

THE VISIONS OF JOHN THE DIVINE

AN EXPOSITION, CHAPTER BY CHAPTER,
OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

BY

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE author has sought to bear in mind the sage advice given to students of prophecy by a learned exponent of the Book of Daniel, not to pose as prophets, when expounding prophecy. He has accordingly studiously avoided sensation-mongering or date-fixing, and contented himself with a simple exposition, often verse by verse, of the twenty-two chapters of "the Revelation of Jesus Christ," confining himself, unless the context manifestly precludes it, to a literal interpretation. These papers have been running for exactly four years in the *Believer's Magazine*, and are now reprinted in response to requests, with but very few alterations or additions. The author prays that the Holy Spirit may use these "Notes on the Apocalypse" to the glory of Christ, and the comfort and up-building of the people of God.

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOOK

THE Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ holds a very important place in the Holy Scriptures. It is the full confirmation of the Old and New Testament prophecies, and of our Lord's promise concerning the Spirit, "He will shew you things to come" (John xvi. 13).

It is also the complement of the Book of Genesis ; that is the book of beginnings ; this of consummations ; there we behold the first Creation, but marred by the fall ; here "the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" ; there sin and death enter the world ; here they are for ever banished ; there man is shut out from the tree of life and exiled from Paradise ; here the promise to the overcomer is, He shall "eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (chap. ii. 7). There the serpent has his world triumph, here he is dethroned and consigned to his eternal abode ; there the rule of the rejected Joseph prefigures here, the universal reign of the rejected but glorified Redeemer.

If Genesis is "the seed-plot" of the Bible, Revelation is its harvest field.

The Revelation, moreover, may be viewed as the concluding chapter of God's Book. How great would be the loss were it to end with Jude's dark picture ! Even there God's final triumph is left in no uncertainty, but the order of events, the special character of God's judgments, as not unmixed with mercy ; the opposition of Satan and men ; the deliverance of

Israel ; the judgment of Babylon ; the marriage of the Lamb ; the setting up of the kingdom, and the final perdition of every foe, would be veiled in obscurity. But God has been pleased to take His people into His counsels and unveil to them their future accomplishment.

The Book is characteristically a book of judgment ; " the acceptable year of the Lord " merges into " the day of vengeance of our God " ; grace has been rejected ; now God puts forth His power to set up the Kingdom.

No wonder if Satan has spared no effort to bring the book into disrepute by the undoubted difficulties of interpretation which it presents to us, the janglings of rival schools, the extravagances of the prophecy-mongers, and the pseudo-spiritual plea that it is unprofitable because it has nothing to do with the evangelization of the masses or " our comfort " ; but even were these premises true, which is not the case, God has given His people the Book and encourages them to read it.

" Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein : for the time is at hand."

Man says you cannot understand it, and it would be useless if you could ; but God says, Read ! hear ! keep, and the blessing is yours. May the Lord help us so to do !

TITLE

The literary title of the book is " the Revelation of John, the theologian."* He was used to transcribe the book, " borne along by the Holy Ghost," but the true moral title is that given in verse 1,

* Theologos.

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ." This is a further encouragement to readers ; for clearly the book is not meant to *conceal*, but to *reveal*. But does this title mean that our Lord is the subject or object of what is revealed, or is He both the Revealer and Revelation? No doubt He is the Revealer, a fact quite consistent with the words "which God *gave* to Him." This need present no difficulty. Clearly all the events recorded for us later, already lay open before Him as a book. It does not say that God "*made*" the Revelation to Him, in the sense of shewing it, but "*gave*," in the sense of entrusting it to Him. He is still "the righteous servant of Jehovah," and only reveals what God commissions Him to reveal. It is as though a father should agree with his son that the time had come to inform his tenants of the arrangements for his approaching coming-of-age and marriage. Such matters would, of course, be already well known to himself ; now he is to reveal them to others. So, not only is Christ the Revealer but the Revelation ; He reveals in the Father's time things *concerning Himself* : He is the Key to the Revelation.

Thus, in chapters i.-iii., He is revealed in His glory as Lord in the midst of His assemblies ; in chapter iv., as Creator on the throne ; in chapter v., as the Lamb once slain ; in chapter vi. and onwards as the Lamb taking possession in power of the purchased possession ; and so on to chapter xix., where He is seen as the Bridegroom, and then revealed in glory as the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," to conquer and reign—"the Sun of Righteousness arising with healing in His wings" ; chapter xx. 11, as the final Judge ; and then in chapter xxii., as the Lamb on the throne in the Eternal State ; and retrospectively in the Epilogue, as the "Bright and Morning Star."

THE GIVING OF THE BOOK

The links in the giving of this Revelation are five-fold. God gives it (*didō-mi*), He is the Source; to Jesus Christ it is entrusted, He is the Agent; His angel carries it, He is the messenger: it is signified (*seemaino*) to John, He is the Seer; He shews (*deiknumi*) it to His fellow-servants, they are the recipients.

This illustrates a wide principle in God's working. He governs by hierarchies; He uses many means to His ends, and often a chain of links to convey His messages. We may miss being a link by mistaking our place in the chain, or by imagining we are the chain. Here again the words "give," "signify," "shew," speak of something being revealed.

The following verse indicates the threefold table of contents—"the Word of God," including, I suggest, the whole book; "the testimony of Jesus Christ," the Lord's actual words; and "all things that He saw," the visions to follow.

DIVISIONS OF BOOK

Verse 19, gives the three main divisions of the book. The third, from chapter iv. 1 onwards, naturally predominates, because there the church period ends, and the book's main subject is God's dealings with Israel and the earth. Also the coming of the Lord, to which all points, is not "*for* His saints," for that will take place in "the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. xv. 52), and how could any but those interested see Him? but *with* His saints, when "every eye shall see Him," for they will have time to do so, aye and "to wail because of Him" (v. 7).

THE OPENING VISION

There was something peculiarly appropriate to John's circumstances in the Revelation being given when it was. He was an exile "for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, in the isle that is called Patmos," a desolate spot in the Ægean Sea, where he might easily think himself shut off from further public service for God and His people. It is not pleasant to find oneself on the shelf of the superannuated. What a cheer then to hear a call to fresh service! The moment was appropriate, too. It was the Lord's Day—*hee kuriakee** *heemera*†—the Lordly day, that is the first day of the week. Naturally, his thoughts would be with his fellow-saints on the mainland. He would know how they needed him. What more consoling vision than of the Lord in their midst! He was, moreover, "in the Spirit," which means much more than that he was in a spiritual frame—"walking in the Spirit," but that he was in that special state in which as a prophet he could catch the vision and prophetic message.

Suddenly he heard a voice behind him, declaring its author as "Alpha and Omega; the first and the last," the all-inclusive, the ever-enduring name. Nor is he left in doubt to whom to communicate the message. Seven churches in Asia‡ are named, true Christian assemblies, which he doubtless already knew well. He turns at the voice and sees the vision.

* This word is only found in one other place in the N.T., *i.e.* 1 Cor. xi. 20, "the Lordly supper;" from this is derived "*church*."

† This expression is quite distinct from "the day of the Lord"—"*hee heemera tou Kuriou*." (See 1 Thess. v. 2, 2 Thess. ii. 2 R.V., 2 Pet. iii. 10), which some try to make out is meant here, but the form of the phrase is against this.

‡ Not, of course, the Continent, as we know it, but the small Roman province at the west end of Asia Minor.

He knows at once the Central Figure, though so changed, still "the same," "One like the Son of Man"; but what the seven golden lampstands meant he could scarcely have divined alone. He learns they represent seven churches, whose foibles and failures he had only too well learned. Yet here they are symbolized as *golden* lampstands. This marks the difference of this chapter and the two following. Here they are in their Divine character, borne out by the following considerations. They are all *golden*—that is, formed by the Spirit out of Divinely created material; Sardis as Smyrna, Laodicea as Philadelphia.

They are all *recipients of the message* of grace and peace from the Triune God, "from Him which is and which was and which is to come," the Eternal One, God the Father, and "from the seven spirits, which are before His throne"—seven in the sense of sevenfold*—especially here in the perfection of His operations among the seven churches. And from Jesus Christ, "the faithful witness"—when in this scene, "the first begotten of the dead" in ascension, and "the Prince of the kings of the earth" in His future reign.

(c) They are all the *objects of the love of Christ*. "Unto Him that loveth us" (no MS. authority for past tense here).

(d) They are *all cleansed (louno)* or loosed (*luo*) "from their sins in His own blood."

(e) They are *all kings*, though not reigning as yet.

(f) They are *all priests* (lit. a kingdom of priests). Let us hold fast, and seek to enter more into the priesthood to God of all believers, denied by clerics and Judaizers in general.

* Compare the sevenfold enduement by the Spirit of our Lord in Isa. xi. 2, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."

(g) They are *all lampstands*, to shine in the darkness around (not candlesticks, which consume themselves ; but lampstands which only lighten by the oil put into them). The Lord is about to address searching words to the heart and conscience of the saints. They must therefore first be established in grace, so as to bear reproof and exhortation.

But " judgment must begin at the House of God," and the description of the Lord in the vision, shews that this is His ministry here. " The garment down to the foot " bespeaks His official character ; " the golden girdle," preparedness for service ; the whiteness of His locks, the purity and maturity of the Ancient of Days ; " the eyes of flame," His all-searching discernment ; " the feet of burning brass," His ways of judgment ; His " voice as the sound of many waters," the compelling character of His message.

EFFECT OF THE VISION

Daniel's prophecy has clearly many points of contact with the Apocalypse. The two books should be read together. Their human authors, too, had much in common. They were both men of God, beloved of the Lord, and in exile ; both prophesy of Israel, under the domination of the Gentile powers, especially in the last days, and of her final deliverance by the coming of Christ in glory. Both had visions of the Lord, similar in circumstance, as we may see by comparing the description of John's vision here, with that of Daniel's in his tenth chapter. This latter was granted to Daniel after three weeks' mourning and fasting, covering the season of the passover and the feast of unleavened bread. For how could he keep the Lord's feasts in a strange land ? Mourning over the captivity of his people was more

seasonable. And how could John "break the bread" alone on that Lord's day in the land of his captivity? What could make up to them their loss? Nothing but a vision of Him whom the passover and "supper" symbolized, the Lord Himself. But the first effect was in either case not comforting, but humbling. Daniel's "comeliness was turned into corruption," and John "fell at His feet as dead." So will nature always fade away in the presence of God. All its beauty is banished, and its pretensions are silenced. So Job "abhorred himself"; Isaiah cried "Woe is me!" Peter confessed himself "a sinful man"; Paul learnt that "in him . . . dwelt no good thing." The self-satisfied, self-conceited man advertises himself, "I am morally out of the presence of God." But God will "dwell with him of *humble and contrite spirit*" (Isa. lvii. 15), and "when men are cast down . . . there is lifting up" (Job xxii. 29). This John experienced, for we read, "He laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not," reassuring words, already familiar to the apostle from the same lips, but never before reinforced by such a full revelation of the Lord. "I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth and was (Greek, 'became') dead, and behold I am alive for evermore,* and have the keys of hell (Hades) and of death." A thief who breaks in and takes the keys has not only robbed the Master of the house, but rendered the house untenable. Christ came forth Conqueror from Hades and the grave, with the keys at His girdle. Henceforth none can lock or unlock those gates, save He. It is then the Eternal One, who cannot change; the Loving One, who can never pass away; the Victor, who cannot but finally win all along the line, who says, "Fear not." Thus the apostle is enabled to bear the presence of his glorified Lord on

* There is but scanty MS. authority for the "Amen" of A.V.

the ground of what He is, and is prepared to receive the Lord's triple commission, namely, describe the vision, convey the messages, and foretell the judgments (v. 19). To enable him the better to do this, the Lord has one more communication to make, the meaning of two symbolical objects shewn in the vision—the stars and the lampstands. The latter we have already understood; “The seven lampstands *are** the seven churches.” As for the “stars,” there is considerable diversity of interpretation. Some have suggested that they were seven messengers of the churches, who had rowed across from the mainland to Patmos, and to whom now the apostle entrusts the Lord's messages. The Greek word for “angel” may also mean messenger, but the weakness of this interpretation is that the seven messengers are purely imaginary, there being no mention of them in the Biblical account. Others teach that the angels represent the “bishop,” “clergyman,” or “pastor” of each church. But such personages, as set over a Christian Church, are quite foreign to the New Testament. In the Ephesian and Philippian churches there were several bishops or elders (Acts xx. 17; Phil. i. 1), and at Antioch there were several prophets and teachers, prominent in the church, and on an equal footing. But modern ecclesiasticism must have its *pre-eminent* man, in every church, and thus the headship of Christ is denied, for “He must in all things have the pre-eminence,” and the operations of the Spirit are curtailed, if not quenched. Others again, with more Scriptural authority perhaps, see

* *I.e.* “represent,” according to a well-understood use of language. It is unreasonable for the Romanist and his imitators to harp on the “is” in our Lord's words, “This is My body,” as though it could only be taken literally. Superstition cannot believe God's simple truth, but greedily seizes every pretext for believing error. They burn Bibles in the aggregate, while hanging on, like drowning men, to any Bible texts which seems to favour their creed. Only truth believes truth.

in the angels the symbol of those gifted to rule and edify in the churches—the under shepherds responsible to the Great Shepherd. The objection to this, which I judge insuperable, is that a symbol cannot be interpreted by a symbol. The lampstands are symbolic of literal churches, and the stars can only represent literal angelic beings. If “angels are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister (*diakonein*) to them, who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb. i. 14), why should this ministry be limited to individual saints? The word for “ministering” is, in fact, *leitourgika*, which has the special sense of public ministry. The ministry of angels is very prominent all through the book, and though it may be difficult to explain in what sense or what degree angels can be spoken of as responsible for the well-being of churches, it is not therefore impossible, and it is much simpler to understand it so.

CHAPTER II

THE MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES

WE now reach the second great division of Revelation, "the things that are," contained in chapters ii. and iii. They comprise the Lord's messages by His Spirit to "the Seven Churches" by the hand of John, addressed in each case to the angel of the church.

It is evident that these messages must have a peculiar voice to us, who live in the same dispensation of the Spirit, and are part of "the things that are." How they should speak to us of our Lord's constant love to His own, and of His tender solicitude for the welfare of His assemblies! In them we learn too the holy judgment of Him "Who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire," and "Who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands," as He views the churches, not as in the previous chapter, on the ground of grace alone, but in the place of public testimony and responsibility. Judgment has begun at the House of God. The works, condition, faithfulness of each church are weighed in "the balances of the sanctuary." Alas! the fine gold has become dim! Human failure has come in. Evil doctrine has built its nest among the saints, and has not been disturbed. Ungodly men have crept in unawares, and made a home for themselves for their own ends. The call now is to the individual to give heed to the Spirit's words and to overcome.

The first way to read these messages is clearly in

their application to seven Christian churches, composed of believers, gathered out from Jew and Gentile, and actually existing at that time. Some indeed have taught that these churches were exclusively Jewish, on the ground of the references to Old Testament history which they contain, *e.g.*, Balaam and Balak, Jezebel, the manna, etc. On this shewing, it could be proved that churches to-day are all Jewish ; for ministry of the Word abounds in such references. It really only shews that they were familiar with the Old Testament, as we should be. They might well, too, be opposed by false Jews, who had rejected their national Messiah (see chaps. ii. 9 ; iii. 9) without being exclusively Jewish themselves. Indeed, there never were such assemblies, except in the early days in Jerusalem.

These churches formed not " the Church of Asia," a great organization ruled from some metropolis like Rome or Canterbury, or even by some central meeting of overseeing brethren, but merely a group of meetings in one geographical area, like the churches of Galatia,* to which one Epistle could be addressed. They were not dependent on one another for direction or rule, nor yet, like Laish of old, mere independent units, " having no business with any man " (Jud. xviii. 7, 28), but interdependent, that is, mutually interested in one another's welfare, and respecting one another's acts of reception and discipline. We cannot imagine, for instance, that had the holders of false doctrine or the evil livers of Pergamos or Thyatira been dealt with, they would have been straightway received, with their sympathizers, in Smyrna or Philadelphia, though possibly at Sardis or Laodicea, in their low state, this might have been possible.

* Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra, according to the best authorities, *e.g.* Sir William Ramsay, LL.D.

No doubt there is an analogy between the history of man, especially of Israel, and that of the church. We may trace it in these messages. The history of the race begins with a fallen man ; that of the church with a fallen Ephesus. Man lost the tree of life ; the overcomer here regains it ; Smyrna in the fires of persecution may present an analogy with Israel in the brick-kilns of Egypt ; Pergamos with Israel in the wilderness, fed with manna and opposed by Balaam ; Thyatira with Israel in the land exposed to the wiles of Jezebel, the idolatress. The overcomer will reign. Sardis may correspond with Israel in Babylon. When tested, some of these could not find " their names written." In Philadelphia we have the return of the remnant ; Laodicea has close analogies with the condition of the returned remnant in Malachi's day. To them later the Lord presented Himself in person in the days of the flesh. But only " they that feared the Lord," the Marys, the Simeons, the Johns opened the door, and with them He supped.

But though such an analogy may be traced, the primary object of the Lord is (1) to warn the seven churches, and through them Christians, collectively and personally, in all time, of the dangers of declension and apostasy, so that giving heed to what " the spirit saith unto the churches," they might prove overcomers, through faith in Jesus as the Son of God (1 John v. 5).

CHARACTER OF THE MESSAGES

And (2) to unfold a panorama of the church's moral condition, during the course of this present age, marked generally on her part by unfaithfulness to Christ and His Word, and on His by constant faithfulness in dealing with her, " with mercy and with judgment."

Each message consists of seven parts (1) the address, (2) the special character in which the Lord presents Himself, (3) commendation (where possible), (4) blame (where necessary), (5) call to repentance, (6) exhortation to hear the Spirit's words (7) promise to the overcomer.

EPHESUS

The Lord's first message is to the Angel representing the church of Ephesus. He presents Himself as the One having all authority—"holding the seven stars in His right hand"; and actually present among them, "walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks"; recalling thus His parting words to His disciples "All authority is given unto Me," and "Lo, I am with you always." This character is specially suitable for the first message, as covering all the rest. Declension early set in in the primitive churches and Ephesus describes their condition. Paul's epistle had revealed to the Ephesian saints how high they had been raised, the Lord's message now declares they were already fallen. But first He commends what He can—their patient continuance in well-doing (see 1 Thess. i. 3); their intolerance of evil men; and their careful testing of professors. Can it be maintained that this service had no value in His eyes? Why detail it then thus? But it had lost its *first quality* value. It could not be gold, it might be silver. But love loves love, and the Lord loves His people too much to be satisfied with anything short of their love, and no activities even "for His name's sake" can make up for its lack. It is Martha and Mary over again: "Thou hast left thy first love." It was the same complaint as to Israel even in Josiah's reformation days—"I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the

wilderness" (Jer. ii. 2), and so it should have been to the end. This declension must lead to a removal of their lamp, except they repent. Let them love their Lord above all, as He loves them, and their works will become once more as at the first! Before closing, the Lord adds one more word of commendation. Though they had left their first love for Him they had not lost their first hate of evil practices. "But (*alla*—same as 'nevertheless' in v. 4), this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate," and so far they had fellowship with Him. To-day it seems to be thought by some to be a mark of Christian charity to hate nothing, but to take up a neutral attitude under guise of impartiality, when evil has to be dealt with. But not so the Lord.

This whole message has a wide application. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches!"

The Lord closes His address with a promise to the overcomer, that is to the one who, by grace, proves himself to the end to be in truth a living member of the Church: "To him He will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." Originally in Eden there was no restriction to eating of the tree of life; but after the fall, man in mercy was excluded, lest, eating it, he should live for ever in a body of sin. The tree of life in the New Paradise will be for all who "wash their robes and make them white" (*i.e.*, in the blood of the Lamb—Rev. vii. 14). (Rev. xxii. 14 R.V.) The ungodly in general (v. 15), and particularly those who "take away from the words of prophecy of this book (v. 19), will be excluded, for they will be outside the heavenly realms. And what can the perennial fruit of the tree be but Christ's perfections ministered by Him to all His redeemed in the power of the Holy Spirit?

SMYRNA

The Lord addresses His second message to the church at Smyrna. Their circumstances correspond with the pagan persecutions of the church under the Roman Emperors, from Nero's to Maximin's (308-14), the severest of them all, according to some historians, as though Satan, like the demon in the Gospels, rent his victim sore, when he saw his time of violence was to close for a season. These persecutions are said to have been ten in number, if so, the Lord's words here, "Ye shall have tribulation *ten* days," may point to this.

Thus did the Lord deal with His Church, who had left her first love. To rekindle it He passed her through the fires of persecution. He tells them plainly who is against them and what to expect. "Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried." The Lord has no reproof for Smyrna. Affliction was doing its salutary work. The word means "myrrh." As piercing the tree allows the fragrant resin to exude, so trial brings out sweet graces from the saints of God. The character in which the Lord presents Himself is in harmony with this. As the Eternal One, "the first and the last," He embraces all time and circumstance: as He who "was dead and is alive," He had tasted to the full the dread experience that threatened them, and in a way they would never know; but He had triumphed.

He knows their works and tribulation. They are poor in one sense but rich in a better, unlike Laodicea later, who thought herself rich, but was reft of all true riches. He knows, too, the blasphemy of the Jewish nation, boasting in their privileges, but really a synagogue of Satan because rejecters of their Messiah. He sustains His people by encouragement,

"Fear none of those things, which thou shalt suffer," and by the offer of a reward, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." It is only to Smyrna and Philadelphia, where there was nothing to blame, that the Lord speaks of a crown. (See chap. iii. 11.) Here it is "a crown of life" (see James i. 12). The promise to the overcomer is specially suited to their need, "He shall not be hurt of the second death." Clearly the prerogative of every true believer (John viii. 51). To be hurt of it will be the terrible and everlasting portion of the lost (Rev. xx. 6, 15), and is the antithesis of "having part in the first resurrection," and of inheriting all things, which will be the glorious and everlasting portion of all the redeemed.

PERGAMOS

This message is succeeded by that to Pergamos. The condition of things here is widely different. They dwell "where Satan's seat is." But he is no longer as "a roaring lion," but "an angel of light" seducing the saints from Christ, as Balaam did Israel, by conformity to worldly religion and the indulgence of the flesh. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Here the deeds of the Nicolaitanes have become stereotyped into doctrine. How often evil practice and evil doctrine go hand in hand; the former engendering the latter, the latter justifying the former. The early persecutions gave place to the patronage of the state. When Constantine adopted Christianity as the Empire religion, with paganism, the latter is said by some to-day to have fallen before Christianity: really it was the church which fell and Christianity became Christendom. The Lord addresses, however, words of encouragement to His true people. He knows their

surroundings* and their experiences, and commends them for "holding fast His name and not denying His faith." They were true "non-conformists," and some had, like Antipas, to suffer for it. No wonder the Lord presents Himself in the character He does, and threatens the seducers with condign judgment. "Repent or else I will come unto *thee* quickly, and will fight against *them* with the sword of My mouth."

The overcomer is promised a three-fold reward, (1) Heavenly sustenance—"the hidden manna," (2) the Lord's open recognition—"a white stone," and (3) His secret appreciation—"a new name, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

THYATIRA

The Lord next addresses the church in Thyatira. Here things are worse even than at Pergamos, for what is *held* is sure ere long to be *taught* publicly or privately and so we read, "I have against thee," ("few things" omitted in best MSS.), "because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to *teach* and to seduce my servants to commit fornication," etc.—the very doctrine of Balaam *held* at Pergamos. It is in an aggravated form too, for he was a man of true prophetic gift, who for reward ensnared Israel, but Jezebel an open enemy of God, who seduced His people and persecuted His servants. But even in her day Jehovah had His witnesses and a remnant He had reserved to Himself, who "had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." So here, too, there was a remnant (v. 24)

* They are said "to dwell where Satan's seat is" and to be suffering "where Satan dwelleth." Sir William Ramsay believes Pergamos is thus described because the chief centre of the worship of the Imperial cult in the early empire. It is also said to have been a great centre of serpent-worship.

known to God and kept by His power. May we all know the privilege of being of it !

It is difficult to conceive an apostolic church as described here, though I am not calling in question its literal character, but any difficulty disappears, if we remember the prophetic character of these messages. The one now before us points on to Christendom in the dark ages of Papal supremacy, to be surpassed still later when the much talked of " Union of Christendom " is realized. Then she will be seen as " Mystery, Babylon the Great," in unholy alliance with the great world-rulers of " the last hour "—" the woman seated on the beast " but soon to be devoured by it. The faithfulness of the remnant at Thyatira was doubtless very acceptable to Him in presence of such terrible inroads of evil, in which many of His own had been implicated. No wonder for such He appears as the Son of God—Giver of life and liberty—object of faith for all who would overcome the world (1 John v. 5), but also as He whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and His feet as fine brass, for He stands at the door as Judge.

He commends the faithful ones for their " works and love and faith and service, for their last works more than the first." But judgment against Jezebel and her children lingers not, and all the churches will know that " He is the One which searcheth the reins and heart," yea even each of *them* will be rewarded according to their works. In the meanwhile on such He lays no other burden, that is no fresh responsibilities ; let each *hold fast what he has*, till He comes. To the overcomer He promises a share in the future Kingdom. This will be when " He rises as the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings " (Mal. iv. 2), but before that day dawn they will enjoy another sight, the shining of the Morning Star (Rev. xxii. 16). This settles the question—

28 THE VISIONS OF JOHN THE DIVINE

Which ends first, the Old or New Testaments? The appeal to the hearers comes last here, and in the three succeeding messages, as though now only overcomers are addressed. The last four phases will continue to the end.

CHAPTER III

SARDIS

THE next message is to Sardis. Hers is the worst state so far. The Lord has nothing to commend in the church as a whole. "Thou hast a name to live and art dead." This describes Protestantism, not in its initial stages, but when stereotyped in its national and political phases. It is not for us to belittle the Reformation—that great work of God, carried out by His chosen instruments, beside whom most to-day are the merest pygmies; but the Luthers, Calvins, Farrels, Knoxes, Wycliffes, the Waldenses and Albigenes even, would be included rather in the faithful remnant of Thyatira. They did not go far enough, but to rescue from the mortuary of Rome, what they did, was a mighty work. Sardis is exhorted to be watchful and to "strengthen the things, which *remain* that are ready to die." There are "remnant" things (*ta loipa*, chap. iii. 2), as well as the remnant (*hoi loipoi*, chap. ii. 24). It is for us to strengthen them and not "to despise the day of small things"—the remnant testimony. There were a few even in Sardis undefiled—and "they will walk with their Lord in white, for they are worthy." This will be, too, the reward of each overcomer, and if names had had to be erased from the ill-kept registers of the church in Sardis, the names of overcomers will never be from the book of life; nor indeed will any name, once written there. But let each make sure of his name being there. Finally, the Lord will confess all His own before His Father and

before His angels. He will not be ashamed of them there.

PHILADELPHIA

The Lord's next message is to Philadelphia. As with Smyrna, no blame attaches here, in happy contrast to Sardis. There it was not as among the Ephesians, some living saints needing the call to "Arise from among the dead" (Eph. v. 14), but men, with a reputation to live, but in God's sight, dead. Things were at their lowest ebb. If God was to have a testimony suited to Himself, *He* must raise it up. Philadelphia, remnant in character, represents the true revival. Here the Lord finds a place in the affections of His people. It was no mere negative protest against evil doctrine and ways, but a positive devotion to His Word and Person. No doubt the evils against which Protestantism takes her stand are serious enough but man cannot live of negations. This is the danger of all controversy, if it stops short of positive testimony. Christ is a positive reality and blessing, "enough the heart and mind to fill." And who should be attracted to Him as those whom He has placed under eternal obligations by giving Himself for them and whom He ever loves with a constant love?

It is scarcely fitting for any company of saints to claim to be Philadelphia, much less to monopolize such a claim. "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." We cannot afford to ignore the Spirit's working down the post-Reformation centuries. No doubt the Puritan, Quaker, and Methodist movements, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (and these were far from being the only workings of the Spirit), were lacking in scriptural intelligence, did not go far

enough, and have sadly degenerated to-day, but who can doubt that in each case God did raise up a faithful remnant, who "kept His Word and did not deny His Name," and were for a time at least, an untold blessing to thousands. Perhaps we may say that "Philadelphia" represents the Evangelical revivals since National Protestantism became largely formal and dead.

Nor has the Lord ceased to work in grace to His people in the past hundred years. What gracious revivings He has given! What a return to His Word! What a re-digging of apostolic wells! What treasures found in the sand! It might be said that this revival has gone back further and deeper than any before it. "Other men laboured and we are entered into their labours." Let us be thankful to have any part or lot in it; not puffed up with a sense of superior grace or knowledge, but rather humbled at the degree in which Satan and the flesh have marred so divine a testimony. Our resource is still in God; we have His Word and His Spirit. To Philadelphia and her children comes the word "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

To this church the Lord presents Himself as the Holy One and the True, as though counting to find among them something to correspond to His character; and as the One, too, Who has the Key of the house of David—that is, of His treasure house as Isaiah xxii. shews. For there Shebna, representing the first Adam in the place of responsibility is the treasurer of David, and as such fails. But God has another to take his place, Eliakim—"the one whom God sets up" representing in Isaiah Christ as the Messiah of Israel—the nail on which all the cups and flagons hung—that is all the hopes of Israel depended. But when the nail is cut down, that is, when the Messiah was crucified, all their hopes perished; they

“thought it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.” But the nail was fastened again, this time to the throne of God, and here the Lord is revealed in a new relation, as the hope of His Church. The open door would be primarily that of God’s treasure house—“Christ in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” It is the open door of liberty, discovery, and opportunity—that door on the inner side, for him who enters the door of salvation, by which “He shall go in and out and find pasture” (John x. 9).

But does the Lord undertake to restore to a remnant the outward signs of power of the first days? It was not so with the restored remnant from Babylon; rather was there paucity of numbers, poverty of material supplies, weakness in endeavour. To their enemies, they were “these feeble Jews”; but they gave Jehovah the central place, in rebuilding His altar, and what they found written in the Book, they carried out to the best of their ability and refused all co-operation with the religious world.

So with Philadelphia; they had no apostolic powers, but only “a little strength, they kept His Word and did not deny His Name.” This is more than not denying His deity or offices; they did not attach that name to things the very reverse of Christian, as is too often done to-day. However little the religious world may value these works, they count much with Christ, and those who now despise the faithful ones, will one day be humbled before them and know that He has loved them. And He will save these from “the hour of temptation” (which shows that this goes on to the end)—the great tribulation—which will try them that dwell on the earth. The overcomers will be pillars in the temple of God, that is, like Jacob’s pillars, witnesses to His

grace and will have on them the names of God, of the New Jerusalem and the new name of Christ Himself, bespeaking relationship, citizenship, and intimate communion—the untold privilege of the saints.

LAODICEA

The Lord's closing message is to the church at Laodicea.

The town was situated between Colosse and Philadelphia. The church of the latter being its nearest neighbour of the "Churches of Asia"; but how far removed from it morally.

Yet Laodicea's privileges had been great : she had been the object of Paul's solicitude and greeting (Col. ii. 1 ; iv. 15) ; the recipient of an apostolic epistle (Col. iv. 16) ; the subject of the prayers of Epaphras (Col. iv. 13) ; and most probably, the scene of John's labours. But so low had she fallen that the Lord had to say, " I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot : I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth." Indifference and self-satisfaction characterized the church. Is not this the attitude of the world and its churches to-day, and of much that bears the name of Christ ?

There is a close correspondence between the Lord's message to Laodicea and the prophecy of Malachi to the representatives of the remnant of Israel, who had returned from Babylon in 530 B.C. The Prophet wrote in 420 B.C., and what a state he describes !—the love of Jehovah doubted, His Name despised, His standard of holiness degraded, His storehouse depleted, His rights denied. But there was still a faithful remnant, and while all these discordant

voices were being raised against the Lord, His ear was delighted at their words, "Then they that feared the Lord spake* to one another, and the Lord hearkened and heard," etc., and so pleasing to Him was their conference that a special record was made of it. There was the same spirit of boasting self-sufficiency in this church as in the mass of Israel. The Lord presents Himself to them as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." In speaking of Himself as "the Amen,"† I think the Lord would emphasize His character as the One Who stands for God, justifies all His purposes, promises, and verdicts, and sees they are made good. As "the faithful and true witness," He is not only the entirely trustworthy One, but fully qualified to bear witness by His personal knowledge and competence; and then, if all that pertains to the old creation, including the flesh in those on Christian ground, ends in failure, God starts afresh in Christ, for He is "the beginning of the creation of God" (*i.e.*, of the new creation in resurrection, corresponding to "the first-begotten of the dead" of chap. i. 5).

To what, then, does the Laodicean condition correspond in the present era? The usual reply is

* "Often" as in A.V. to be omitted, see R.V. There seems to be nothing in the Hebrew text to justify its inclusion.

† The word is from the Hebrew root *ah-man*, "to prop," "to be firm." Amen is really a verbal adjective "firm." Then it came to be used adverbially—surely, affirming the truth of what was to follow, as so often in our Lord's words, and still stronger in double form. Then it came to be added, first in the synagogue, and later in Christian assemblies by those present at the close of some public utterance of praise or prayer; *e.g.* "How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say the Amen (*i.e.* the well-known Amen) at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?" (1 Cor. xiv. 16). This primitive Christian custom has so fallen into disuse among us that instead of a hearty Amen, a dead silence often follows an exercise of prayer, etc., and the brother as he sits down, may ask himself whether his brethren disagree with his utterances, or have merely failed to understand him.

to the "Down-grade" movement, Modernism, and such like. But there is not a hint in this message of evil doctrine, nor yet, be it remarked, of moral lapse. Modernist organizations are not recognized in the Word, except perhaps as "synagogues of Satan"; how could one such be a golden candlestick (see chap. i. 11-13)? Laodicea had no Balaams or Jezebels among them; and there was apparently no departure from Scriptural order.

Perhaps as far as outward things they would compare quite well with Philadelphia, but the temperature of the two churches was different. Laodicea was Philadelphia cooled down from boiling* to lukewarm; it was Philadelphia with Christ at the door. They possibly quoted Matthew xviii. 20, "There am I in the midst of them," but they were not practically, experimentally gathering to His Name, and He was morally outside. The Lord wished they were boiling or cold; then they either would not need His reproof, or needing it, would be brought to repentance. But, alas, they had no inkling of their true condition. "Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and hast need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one, and pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee, etc." How far they were from Smyrna's state—poor in this world's goods, but spiritually rich! Was there any hope? Yes, but only in the Lord's personal dealings. "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed . . . and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." The Lord's counsel can only be rightly understood in the light of verse 19: "As many as I *love*, I rebuke and chasten, be

* Zestos, the word translated "hot" in verses 15 and 16 is really "boiling," from "Zeo," to boil.

zealous* therefore and repent." His unchanged love to His people is the secret of restoration, so He assures them of it, as Israel of old (Mal. i. 2) ; and the remedy is the same (Malachi iii. 2)—the Lord Himself, as " the refiner's fire," to purge away the dross, and as " fuller's soap " to cleanse their defiled garments. We know that salvation is of grace and cannot be bought, and we cannot be too clear about it. The only adequate price has been paid—the " Blood of Christ " ; but this is no question of salvation, but of restoration. It is " the purifying of the sons of Levi . . . that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." And the Lord says " buy ! " It is possible to miss the blessing. Will we pay the price ? We must pass through the fire ; shall we submit to the refiner, and humbling ourselves under His chastening hand, " buy " of Him, the precious experience of being refined as gold ? It needs too, that He apply " the fuller's soap," to cleanse the garments defiled by sin and self. We must " buy " this too, and lastly we must utilize the ministry of the Spirit to bring to bear on us the convicting and enlightening power of the Word. It is available to faith (Gal. iii. 5). Laodicea was being dealt with governmentally, " that she might not be condemned with the world," e.g., the apostates of Malachi iii. 5. But after all the appeal is individual. It is not for us to say that the mass of the people of God will not hear, but if they do hear it will be as individuals. This is of course not the door of salvation of John x., nor yet that of discovery and opportunity opened to Philadelphia ; it is the door of the will, that opens on the inside. " Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : *if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me.*" Shall not the

* Zeleuo—from the same root as above, " to boil."

response be "Come in, O Lord, wherefore standest Thou without" ?

The overcomer is promised to sit with the Lord on His throne, even as He has overcome and is set down with His Father on His throne. Could there be a higher place ?

CHAPTER IV

THE CLAIMS OF THE THRONE

WE now begin the third section of the book, as a comparison of the divine syllabus in chapter i. 19, with verse 1 here, where the same words occur, shews. "Hereafter" in both cases, should be "after these things" (*meta tauta*). The slight change from "shall" to "must," only shews that the time presses. We emerge then into the wide prophetic area which forms the main body of the Apocalypse. Chapters iv. and v. are introductory, representing the undefined interval, between the rapture of the church and the opening scenes of the day of the Lord.

There are other signs which show a fresh departure: the voice, though the same trumpet-voice of chapter i., utters a fresh call, "Come up hither!" It is not a door of service on the earth which is opened, but a door of entrance into heaven. The apostle had been on earth occupied with the local churches in their testimony and walk down here; henceforth he is in heaven, occupied not so much with the church, though he sees it triumphant, but with events taking place below in the warring world, the scene of God's judgments, of man's ripe rebellion, and of Israel's testimony and deliverance.

When John hears the voice, "immediately he is in the Spirit," that is he is rapt in vision up to heaven. HIS TRANSLATION IS, I doubt not, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RAPTURE OF THE WHOLE CHURCH.

The first thing he beholds is a throne, not *being*

set, but set, for it "was of old" (Psa. xciii. 27). This is central to the chapters and a key to the book. A throne signifies the seat of authority, and symbolizes monarchical rule, and the whole system of kingly power. God too, has a throne and is about to vindicate His claims and assert His sole rights to reign in His universe. But more important than the throne, is the One on it—"And One sat on the throne"; no mere Spiritual Presence—a Shekinah glory as of old, but a visible Person. God has found one worthy and competent to fill the throne—"the image of the invisible God," for this is only another "Revelation of Jesus Christ." "God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness" (Psa. xlvii. 8), but in the Person of His Son—the Man of Calvary. As the first thing that met the high-priest's eye, as year by year he entered within the veil, was the glory of Jehovah between the Cherubim, so the first thing in heaven is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. His glory is represented here as a jasper and a sardine stone; not the incommunicable Divine glory, but one which He communicates to His own, for in Rev. xxi. 10, 11, "the bride, the Lamb's wife is said to have the glory of God and her light (that is the expression of that glory) was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone,* clear as crystal." Probably these stones stand for attributes appropriate to the Lord's glory as King, about to assert His right to reign, for "Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne" (Psa. lxxxix. 14). The rainbow round about the throne is very significant, and is another key to God's dealings at this period. It takes us back to the Noachic Covenant, which guarantees to mankind certain abiding blessings, "*while the earth remaineth*, seed time and

* The stone we know as a jasper is neither clear nor precious; it is supposed that a diamond is meant. The sardine is probably a ruby.

harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. viii. 22). By the rainbow around the throne then God would shew that He sets a limit to His apocalyptic judgments. It will be a cup of judgment, not untempered with mercy, but a *mixed* cup (see Psa. lxxv. 8), with repentance in view, in contrast with the fearful cup of *unmixed* wrath of eternal judgment (chap. xiv. 10).

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

Next the apostle views four-and-twenty thrones* nor are they unoccupied. The number takes us back to the twenty-four courses of the Israelitish priesthood, but is doubtless symbolical. They are men redeemed by blood and prepared by grace to occupy those thrones—not merely saved Jews, but men saved from Jew and Gentile. They are, I believe, *the overcomers* of chapters i. and ii., and perhaps in their priestly character—men who by grace have proved themselves true members of the Church which is His body. They are clothed in white robes (chap. iii. 5); they are associated with the throne (chap. iii. 21); they are crowned with crowns of victory (*stephanos*) (chaps. ii. 11; iii. 11). It may be asked where the Old Testament saints are represented. The answer is that they are not mentioned here, as this does not profess to be a complete picture of heaven. For instance there is no mention of angels in the chapter, as otherwise would be the case.

In the twenty-four elders we seem to have the church in her priestly character and in the enjoyment of her privileges and rewards, not manifested indeed till Christ's return in glory, but already allotted. Our attention is next drawn to the fact that "out of the throne proceeded lightnings and

* Same word—*thronos*.

thunderings and voices." This again is significant, and gives character to the book. That throne had long become, to the world, as an extinct volcano. Modern thought, with impious unanimity had passed a resolution against future judgment. Men had ceased to fear, because there was nothing to fear. But now there are ominous signs of renewed activity. Those fearful flashes, those crashes of thunder, those solemn voices speak in clarion tones of a storm of judgment about to break. The throne had long been a throne of grace, now it is taking on another character. The Lord rebuked the "Sons of Thunder" for suggesting the calling down fire from heaven, even as Elias did: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." The Lord was present in grace, "not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." What was not fitting then, will be fitting now. Clearly there is a change of dispensation. And yet the so-called "historical" interpreters of the book would have us believe that the Apocalypse represents God's dealings with the world while "grace reigns through righteousness." Truly they know not what manner of Spirit it is of.

The attention of the Seer is now directed to two objects *before* the throne, the first—"seven lamps of fire burning . . . which are the seven Spirits of God." These we saw, in chapter i. 4, represent the sevenfold manifestation of the One Holy Spirit. Here these take on a character suited to the scene, that of lighted lamps ready to pierce the darkness below, and search the hearts of men. The action of the Spirit in this book is no longer that of the indwelling Comforter, but of "a Spirit of burning." The other object was "a sea of glass like unto crystal," that is, it was transparent like crystal; no mere lake, but a veritable ocean, a magnificent space, not yet occupied but destined for the victors of a later day (see chap.

xv. 2). This confirms the thought that the scene before us is only intended as a partial representation of heaven. There will be, it is true, only one centre there—the Lamb on the Throne—but many circles of blessing, of which only one is included here.

THE FOUR LIVING BEINGS

We now turn to the important consideration of the four living beings. Most are aware that the word is *Zōon*, quite distinct from that translated “beast,” later on in the book, *Theerion*, which would be properly “wild beast” (e.g. chap. xiii. 1 and 11). We will consider first their position and then their identity. They are said to be “in the midst of the throne and round about the throne.” How are we to conceive these apparently incompatible positions? May not the twelve oxen supporting on their backs the molten sea of Solomon’s Temple afford us some light? They were “round about” it, in that they looked out from under it, in companies of three, to the four points of the compass, but they were also “in the midst of it,” for all their hinder parts were inward (2 Chron. iv. 4). So here we are to conceive of the throne as resting on the four living beings, who are looking out from beneath, north, south, east, and west, but their forms are inward, “in the midst of the throne.” Who then are they? We cannot but associate them with the cherubim of the Old Testament Scriptures, who are ever connected with the throne of God, as its supports and guardians. The subject is not without difficulty, which is only increased by the attempt usually made to interpret the cherubim always in the same way. They are always, it is true, guardians of the throne of God, but sometimes they are symbols, sometimes literal angelic beings, and sometimes they represent Christ.

Thus Satan was originally one of the cherubim, if, as there can be no reasonable doubt, Ezekiel xxviii. 12-19 describes him. Perhaps he was the highest of them all, for he is addressed as "the anointed cherub, that covereth,"* or as simply "the covering cherub." Then in heaven the original four cherubim would be as here in Rev. iv., and Lucifer the fifth, covering the throne; his duty being specially to watch over and maintain its rights. Instead, he coveted it. Who can estimate the terrible responsibility and enormity of his fall? I would judge that the cherubim placed in Eden were also angelic beings, the sword turning every way being the Shekinah glory, the Holy presence of Jehovah-Elohim, resting on them as on a throne. In the tabernacle the cherubim occur again. They were "in the two ends of the mercy-seat," "of the mercy-seat (marg. 'of the matter of the mercy-seat') shall ye make the cherubim" (Ex. xxv. 18, 19), "beaten out of one piece made he them, on (or out of, marg.) the two ends of the mercy-seat" (chap. xxxvii. 7). The cherubim were part of the mercy-seat. They were one with it, but it was more than the oneness of relationship of Heb. ii., "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of (lit. out of) one," with which it has sometimes been confused, but the oneness of identity. I believe the cherubim here are symbolical of the holiness and righteousness of Christ. No one was ever so jealous for God's rights as He. He died to maintain them. The gaze of the cherubim was fixed on the mercy-seat, but it was not the gold of which it was made which satisfied them, but the blood of atonement, for that alone vindicated all the claims of God. The blood-stained mercy-seat is a

* Sah-chach means (1) to hedge round, (2) to protect, cover over, (3) to cover, to fence round. This word to cover is used of the cherubim covering the ark.—(1 Kings viii. 7.)

figure of Christ, in His atoning work, Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (lit. mercy-seat) through faith, by His blood (Rom. iii. 25 R.V.).

Nothing is said in Isaiah vi. of any identification of the seraphim and the one on the throne. They are angelic beings. The word is from *sah-raph*, to burn in judgment. The seraphim carry out God's behests in judgment. It is the word used in Lev. iv. 12, 21, of the burning of the sin-offering outside the camp. In Ezekiel the four living beings seem symbolical of the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry as King of Israel, Perfect Servant, Son of Man and Son of God.

But what do the four living creatures of Rev. iv. represent? Not mere symbols, for they speak, worship, act, etc. Not angelic beings, for they are distinguished from such in chapters v. 11 and vii. 11; not the Lord, as in Ezekiel, for they are seen worshipping Him (*e.g.*, chap. v.).

WHO ARE THESE ?

Before deciding who they are, we may notice the close sympathy existing between them and the elders. In fact, the two companies, as such, are never mentioned apart. In chapter iv. the adoration of the four beings leads to the worship of the twenty-four elders. In chapter v. they are associated even more closely, for the Lamb is said to be in the midst of both companies; in verse 9 both sing the new song, and later both acquiesce in the Universal Worship paid to God and the Lamb.

In chapter vii. 11, the two, I was going to say the twin companies, again appear together, but now the elders are named first, as though to avoid the appearance of precedence of one over the other. In chapter xv. 7, the former order is reverted to, whereas in chapter xix. 4, the last occurrence, elders

come first and both companies are seen worshipping God for His judgment on the great whore. To sum up, the two companies are found together nine times, never apart, and always in the most intimate association and sympathy. Do not such considerations justify the belief that the living beings and elders represent the same body of saved persons in different aspects? We have seen that the elders represent the church sharing in the privileges and rewards of the throne, the four living beings will then portray her as sharing its responsibilities and government.

They were full of eyes before and behind, skilled to understand both the secrets of the throne and what is open and revealed. Their similitude is reminiscent of Christ in His four-fold manifestation in the gospels, they are in fact formed in the very likeness of Him whose Spirit dwells in them. Like the seraphim of Isaiah's vision they had each six wings, and they were full of eyes within, that is filled with spiritual apprehension of their own position and blessing in Christ. Not only so, but they bear witness to the divine glory. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." And this ascription of "glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever," does not fail to find an echo in the elders, who fall down and worship, and cast their crowns at His feet, recognizing the worthiness of the Lord to receive their homage on a ground *preceding* redemption and independent of it, "for Thou hast created all things and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."

CHAPTER V

THE RIGHTS OF THE LAMB

THE attention of the seer is now recalled to the Occupant of the throne. His own position, as regards that throne, seems to be changed, for whereas in the previous chapter he had been as a spectator outside the circle of what he is describing, he is now "a partaker of the benefit," inside the privileged circle, nearer the throne even than the twenty-four elders, as near as the four living creatures, for he tells us "I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book"* (or "a scroll" as in chap. vi. 14) "written within and on the back side and sealed with seven seals." The secret of this nearness is in the special character in which Christ is revealed in this chapter. The Lamb has a right to have His people near Himself. John is near enough to see that there is writing inside the scroll and on the back side, probably the descriptive title of its contents, and to notice that it is sealed with seven seals, and therefore only to be opened by breaking them.

* The word is "biblion"—a diminutive—a little book or scroll, from biblos or bublos—the Greek name for the papyrus—the water-reed of Africa, from the pith of which the earliest paper was manufactured. This is the most enduring of all paper. The papyri written in Aramaic discovered in 1904-7 in the island of Elephantiné, or Jeb, on the Nile opposite Assuan, bearing the dates of Ezra and Nehemiah (*circa* 450 B.C.) were in excellent preservation, though at least 2300 years old. The writer well remembers, when in Central Africa in 1917, coming on great marshes on the Congo River covered with some wonderful water-reed seven or eight feet high, with graceful tufts. What could it be, he asked himself. What was his interest to learn it was the celebrated papyrus of antiquity! When we are asked to bring our Bibles, what is really said is "bring your papyri!" "Papyrus" itself is a word of Egyptian origin.

WHAT IS THE LITTLE BOOK ?

We might have expected a sceptre or a sword in the hand of One sitting on a throne, but it is a scroll. This is clearly of great importance in the development of God's purposes. Accordingly, "a strong angel proclaims with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof?" Evidently nothing can proceed, until the rightful opener of the book is found. What then is this book? Some reply at once the Bible. But is the Bible sealed with seven seals? or if it be a sealed book to some, are there none who may open it? Others suggest the book of judgment. But when the time comes to open that, the One on the throne will do it, and no one else will be asked to. Some identify it with the little book of Rev. x. 10, which contains the prophetic message John is to deliver, "concerning (R.V. margin) many people and nations, etc.—but we may safely dismiss this explanation," the word is different (*biblaridion*), and that book is clearly of quite minor importance to the book here.

It will help to a true solution, if we remember, that what God is doing in the Revelation period, is not gathering out a people for His name from Jew and Gentile to form the church, but taking possession of the purchased inheritance in view of delivering Israel and setting up the millennial kingdom on righteous ground, as we shall see, and that by power.

A comparison of this chapter with the thirty-second of Jeremiah throws light on the question before us. There a business transaction is carried out. Jeremiah's uncle Hanameel had a field in Anathoth to sell and Jeremiah was the "*goël*" or next of kin, who had the right of redemption. He pays the purchase price of seventeen shekels of silver, *subscribed the evidence* and sealed it. He then

took witnesses and weighed the purchase money. Then he took the sealed roll—the evidence of the purchase, written within and without, and entrusted it to his friend Baruch the son of Neriah, in the presence of the witnesses and all concerned, to be put away in a safe place for many days” (v. 14). Here we have five things: the “*goël*,” redeemer (who would alone have the right to open the sealed scroll), the purchased possession, the price paid, the witnesses, the deed of purchase or the title-deeds signed and sealed. In our chapter we have something corresponding to all these, which we will note as we come to them, only registering now the conviction that Jeremiah’s scroll of the evidence of purchase finds its parallel in the little book “in the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne.” It is the title-deeds of the purchased possession—the earth. The treasure found in the field in Matt. xiii. 44, represents, not a bag of specie, which might be transported from the field, but something indissolubly connected with it, as for instance a gold mine, which necessitated the purchase of the whole field. The field is the world: Israel, God’s earthly people, is the treasure. The same price paid by the true kinsman, namely—all that he had—for the pearl (v. 46) sufficed also for the purchase of the field. By His precious blood, Christ became the Redeemer of His people, and the Purchaser of the Inheritance.

The proclamation of the strong angel elicits no response. Heaven makes no reply; earth is silent; the great usurper himself is dumbfounded. “No one (*oudeis*) in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book neither to look thereon.” John spiritually intelligent, wept much, not for himself, but because aware that the fulfilment of God’s purposes depended on the opening of the book. ‘One of the elders, however, who is in the

counsels of God, reassures him, "Weep not, behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David hath prevailed to open the book and the seven seals thereof."

The Lord is here presented in His Kingly Character—for as we read in 1 Chron. v. 2, "Judah prevailed above his brethren and of him came the chief-ruler (marg. prince)." Of Judah, Jacob said, "Judah is a lion's whelp . . . he couched as a lion. . . . The sceptre shall not depart from Judah . . . until Shiloh come" (Gen. xlix. 9-10). That is, though Reuben lost the birthright, and Simeon and Levi their place among the tribes Judah would never lose his prerogative, as the royal tribe, "until He come whose right it (the diadem) is" (Ezek. xxi. 27).

But though Christ will reign legally as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Judah had many noble sons, but none like Him!) as the lineal heir of David's throne, yet David himself saith, "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on My right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psa. cx. 1). Christ was not only the descendant or branch of David, but He was the "Root of David," and thus had a higher right, a prior claim, as "the Son given," for "the government shall be on His shoulder" Who is at once "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" . . . and "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end" (Isa. ix. 6-7).

However the "King shall reign in righteousness," that is His claims will be established on a righteous basis.

The next verse reveals how the Lion of Judah had prevailed. "And I beheld and lo! in the midst of the throne and of the four living ones, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the

seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth." This is the secret of victory. It was as the Lamb He had prevailed, not by power, but "out of weakness,* not at the expense of righteousness, but by payment of the full price. Though alive, for He was seen "standing," He still bore the marks of His sacrificial† death. God could not save righteously by a display of omnipotence, every claim of His holiness must be divinely met. It was as the Sacrificial Lamb that this was accomplished. At the cross He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, disannulled Satan, spoiled principalities and powers, bore His people's sins, and paid the purchase price of the inheritance.

But not only does the Lamb still bear the marks of His sacrificial work, but also the outward and visible signs of His power and wisdom—"seven horns and seven eyes." A horn, from being the instrument of strength in cornutes, becomes the symbol of strength, e.g., "The horn of Moab is cut off" (Jer. xlviii. 25). So to exalt the horn of anyone is to increase his power and dignity. A horn is often used for an earthly power, e.g., in Zech. i. 18, and later in this book, for the "Great Powers" of the revived Roman Empire, which will be broken before Christ at His coming in glory. The "seven eyes" are explained as "the seven Spirits of God (*i.e.*, the sevenfold Spirit) sent forth into all the earth," or as Zechariah, to quote him again, describes them, "the eyes of the

* A shallow heresy of to-day argues that, because our Lord Jesus was crucified "out of weakness," "it is incontestable that He was not omnipotent." It is entirely to misunderstand the greatness of His Person and the voluntary character of His work to argue thus. Was Samson then "incontestably" weak, because he allowed himself to be bound with new ropes? Was it not rather that "out of weakness he became strong"? So it was through the death on the cross that our Lord triumphed openly over all His foes.

† "Sphazo," the word used here for "slain" is the usual translation in the LXX of the Hebrew "shah-ghat," often used of slaying sacrifices.

Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth " (chap. iv. 10). This shews once more how each Person of the Sacred Trinity shares in the accomplishment of these great designs. Now, when the Lamb claims His right to open the book, no one says Him nay. The One who occupies the throne hands it to Him, and then those who correspond, I believe, to the witnesses of the purchase in Jer. xxxii., at once attest His claims. " The four living beings and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one of them a harp, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints." " Which " here agrees with " vials "—the prayers of the saints, the vehicle of these odours, even the fragrance of Christ, in Whose Name they ascend (see Exod. xxx. 34-38). These saints are the faithful remnant of Israel, God's witnesses on the earth. Even to-day the Jews are divided into two camps, liberal and orthodox ; the former the advance guard of the apostate nation to be ; the latter the nursery from which will arise the faithful remnant of the last days. These prayers, no doubt Spirit-indited, call upon the Lamb to intervene on their behalf, and the heavenly witnesses present them to Him.

THE NEW SONG

Not only so ; they attest His rights in a new song. This is often read as though it were the new song of their own redemption, but surely they will have begun already to sing that on earth. There are nine new songs in the Bible ; the first is the new song of salvation, " He hath put a new song in my mouth even praise unto our God " (Psa. xl. 3) ; next (2) the new song of the righteous (Psa. xxxiii. 3), for the blessings of Psalm xxxii., of which forgiveness comes first ; then (3) the new song in honour of the Coming Messiah

—the servant of Jehovah (Isa. lxii. 10) ; next (4) the new song of all the earth for the coming King (Psa. xcvi. 1) ; (5) the new song of Israel for His marvellous works (Psa. xcvi. 1) ; then (6) the new song of Israel for their King (Psa. cxlix. 1) ; (7) the new song of Messiah for victory (Ps. cxliv. 9-10) ; (8) the new song of heaven, which only the 144,000 on earth could learn (Rev. xiv. 3) ; and lastly, the new song before us in this chapter ascribing to the Lamb worthiness to open the Book. We love to think of the Lord as our own Redeemer and of the price He has paid for our ransom, "His own precious blood," and certainly in a general sense this chapter brings Him before us in this character, as the Lamb once slain. But strictly speaking, this is not the subject of this song. His redemptive work, however blessedly it applies to us, is of much wider application than to the church alone, and extends to the earthly saints of the purchased inheritance. This is the case here and for three reasons. First, there is no manuscript authority for "*us*" in the phrase as in A.V. "redeemed *us*" ; and also, "*made them*" and "*they shall reign*" of R.V. have stronger support than "*made us*," and "*we shall reign*." (2) The word for "redeem" is not the ordinary word "*lutroo, lutron*," of 1 Peter i. 18 ; Titus ii. 14 ; Heb. ix. 22 ; Matt. xx. 28 ; Mark x. 45, but *agorazo* — "to buy in the market," and except here and chapter xiv. 3 the word is always translated "buy." (3) We should not expect these heavenly beings to be looking forward to reigning on the earth, whereas "*they shall reign*," fits in very well with the hope of earthly saints (see Exod. xix. 6). The subject of the song is not the worthiness of the Lamb in general, "to be exalted" in the midst of the throne (we glory in that) but "Worthy art Thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof ; for Thou wast slain and didst

purchase unto God with Thy blood (men) of (Greek—out of) every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a Kingdom and priests; and they shall reign* upon the earth."

This is indeed a new song. The Father's time, "which He had put in His own power," for Christ to restore the Kingdom to Israel, has at length arrived, and the prophecies touching that Kingdom and its establishment by judgment and power, are about to be fulfilled at last. Christ is to have His true place in the scene of His rejection. Now the angels are introduced for the first time. They form a circle outside that inner one which has hitherto occupied us, "I beheld and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne of the living beings and the elders and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands."

They are of the "elect," but are not the subjects of redemption, but those things they had desired to look into—"the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow," lie open before them as a book. They understand all now, it calls forth from them an acknowledgment of the worthiness of the Lamb, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing," a wonderful seven-fold ascription of praise to Him, through Whom God had ever revealed Himself to them,† and now

* "Alexandrinus," the great Uncial MS. at the British Museum, known as A, and also another Uncial of the tenth century, and one of the Syriac Versions give "reign" in present tense, and this is adopted by the R.V. Sinaiticus, known as Aleph, at (Petrograd) and P of the sixth century, and a number of other authorities give "shall reign," and this I have adopted as apparently more in accordance with the facts. How could the saints be reigning before the Kingdom was set up?

† The word in John i. 18 is not only no-man—but "oudeis"—no one.

as the Atoning Victim in a way and degree, as never before. Still the circle of praise widens, and we are carried on not only to the millennial Kingdom,* but to that "far-off event" at the close of it, when Christ shall have subdued every enemy under His feet and shall have restored the Kingdom to God, purged of every foe, and in enhanced glory. To this universal note of praise the living creatures add their Amen, and the elders, in perfect accord, fall down and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever.

* This is usually said to be a millennial song, but how could every creature sing it in a scene where sin will still exist and many will be yielding only feigned obedience?

CHAPTER VI

THE BREAKING OF THE SEALS

THIS chapter inaugurates God's main purpose in the Apocalyptic period, the claiming of the inheritance. Accordingly as the Lamb breaks the seals of the title deeds there is a putting forth of power with this end in view. Judgment not essentially miraculous at first, but providential, is inflicted. In this, God's strange work, are associated the four living beings, and fitly so, for they are the vindicators of the claims of His throne. As each of the first four seals is broken, a various manifestation, and growing in intensity, is invoked by a living creature. Come! they cry to each horseman in turn. No doubt Satan will be working out his nefarious schemes, and will exhibit his mighty powers in unusual ways, but only within the limit of God's permission.

WHO ARE THE RIDERS ?

Many guesses have been hazarded as to the signification of the four riders. Some have seen in them the four great Gentile powers, but why these should come in here is not clear seeing three at least have already passed away.

Some think they mean four phases of belief or misbelief in the Christian era, primitive Christianity. Mohammedanism, Romanism and Infidelity. This may serve as a warning as to how far unbridled imagination may lead away even Christian expositors. Some identify the rider on the white horse with that

other rider of chapter xix., Who is undoubtedly our Lord, for He is called "the Word of God." I think a comparison of the two shews they are entirely different: for one thing, that One will be crowned with many diadems, or royal crowns; this one wears a victor's crown or stephanos; that One will be succeeded by no other, this one by three other riders, the first of whom represents, what is so often the aftermath of war—Red revolution as lately in Russia, Turkey, China, to be succeeded by a third providential visitation—famine, as is seen at the present time in Russia and China, to refer once more to these unhappy countries. The ordinary laws of supply and demand are forcibly interfered with and what can result but famine? Without attempting to interpret every detail, it may suffice to say, that the ordinary price of a measure or choenix—the daily allowance of a slave—would have been about one-eighth of a day's wage, "a penny." Here prices have octupled. But while there is this scarcity in the cereals, mercy provides that the supplies of oil and wine are not yet affected. This would be reserved for the fourth seal, in which God lets loose His four sore judgments: "the sword and the famine and the noisome beast and the pestilence" (see Ezekiel xiv. 21), involving unprecedented mortality over a quarter of the globe. I suggest that these riders represent great movements on the earth, led, no doubt, by men energized by Satan, accomplishing, without dreaming of it, the purposes of God. The fifth seal introduces an entirely new scene, no longer on the earth, but in heaven. The seer beholds "under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held." There is a striking parallel between this chapter and Matt. xxiv. The first four seals seem included in verses 6 to 8, "And ye shall hear of

wars and rumours of wars . . . nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." The fifth seal represents what follows the persecutions of the faithful remnant. It has long been recognized by those who rightly divide the word of truth, especially dispensational truth, that to introduce the church into Matt. xxiv. and to take the coming of the Son of Man as the equivalent of the return of Christ for His church (*e.g.*, as in 1 Thess. iv.), is to confound things that differ. This latter was a mystery only revealed later through Paul, whereas the other is an important subject of Old Testament prophecy. The whole setting of Matthew xxiv. is Jewish; the gospel of the Kingdom is being preached (v. 14), the temple is rebuilt, for there is "a Holy place" (v. 15), the earthly people of Israel are in view (v. 15; and Dan. ix. 24); the centre of things is Judæa (v. 16). The prayer of these souls under the altar shews they are not Christian, and corresponds more with what are known as the "Imprecatory Psalms," that certain ecclesiastics are so troubled about. One whom they reverence, Augustine of Hippo, recognized the importance of dispensational truth, and might teach them a lesson. "Distinguish the dispensations," he used to say, "and the Scriptures will agree." God will not deal with rebels for ever in grace. How else could God judge the world? These are evidently the disembodied souls of martyred Jewish witnesses for God. They will cry for vengeance on their persecutors—the earth-dwellers, a sinister expression not merely meaning persons living on the earth, but only earthly. Their judgment lingereth, but will soon fall. Meantime let these souls (who, be it noted, are not at all in the unconscious sleep the annihilationists

pretend) rest for a little and already enjoy the white robes which God gives them as a present recognition, awaiting their full vindication, when the martyrdom of their brethren is complete.

With the opening of the sixth seal the character of the judgments intensifies. There does not seem sufficient reason to attempt to "spiritualize" these happenings. Signs in the heavens are again and again associated with the last days, when "the powers of heaven shall be shaken." To quote from one prophet only, Joel ; in chapter ii. 11, we read "The earth shall quake before them . . . the sun and the moon shall be dark." In verse 30, "The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come"; in chapter iii. 15, "The sun and the moon shall be darkened and the stars shall withdraw their shining." See also Isa. xiii. 10, 13 ; xxiv. 23 ; Amos viii. ix., etc. The last days shall be characterized by such portents from their beginning to their end. What distinguishes the scene in chapter xvii. from other similar events later on, is that here there is general alarm ; God is speaking and men know it, and fear before Him, whereas later they become hardened in their rebellion and nothing moves them.

CHAPTER VII

THE SEALED 144,000

IN the previous chapter God is seen working in judgment ; here He intervenes in grace. This is the first of the parentheses of the Book. " In wrath God remembers mercy." A respite is granted before the opening of the seventh seal, though it would be far from the truth to assert that the happenings of this or the other parentheses are limited to their exact place in the book. I believe on the contrary, this chapter stretches backward and also forward to the manifestation of Antichrist for there is a close connection between it and chapter xiv. Here the witnesses are being prepared and qualified, there they are seen with the Lamb on Mount Zion, their testimony finished.

This chapter marks a very important crisis in the work of God. The church has been taken away from this scene, but God will not leave Himself without a witness. Israel is once more restored to the place of testimony for God on the earth, not as a whole, however, the *nation* will be apostate, but as a faithful remnant. But not all such will be sealed for public testimony, but only 144,000 chosen from the twelve tribes of Israel. To regard these as the church is, I believe, subversive of all sane interpretation. If the Revelation is to be interpreted on such principles, it can be made to mean anything, that the wildest imagination prompts, as indeed is too often the case. Why such fancies should be called "spiritualizing" or even "interpreting" is very obscure.

Let us then consider the teaching of the chapter. In verse 1 the four angels (number significant of the earth), are seen preparing to let loose the winds of judgment, but they are holding them back or under control (for that is the meaning of the word here) awaiting God's moment. The delay is explained by "another angel ascending from the east bearing the seal of the living God." A work remains to be done, namely, the sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads. Sealing in the Scriptures seems to have the double thought of marking a thing as your own and then as a consequence making it secure. The stone that covered the tomb of our Lord was thus sealed; the little book in chapter v. in like manner; saints are sealed now with the Spirit; God thus marks them for His own and will preserve them "to the day of redemption." So here it would seem clear that it is by no mere outward mark, but by the Spirit these chosen ones are sealed with their Father's name. This is nothing less than the full realization of what Pentecost, in its Jewish aspect, was but a foretaste, namely, the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days foretold by the prophet Joel. "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," etc. (chap. ii. 28). These latter are represented here by the 144,000 and "all flesh" by the great multitude further down in the chapter, for if *myriads* of Israel (Acts xxi. 20), believed as the outcome of the outpouring of the Spirit on 120 at Pentecost, what may be expected when 144,000 are sealed with that same Spirit and go forth to a world-wide testimony? This is the true answer to those who assert that the church must be intended here, on the ground that there is no possibility of such wide-spread blessing when the church indwelt by the Spirit is gone. This is a

mistaken conclusion. The Spirit as the Indweller of the Body of Christ will go, but He will not cease to act and I believe on a greater scale than ever before known. That will be the great missionary epoch ; it will be " the harvest of the earth " (see chap. xiv. 15). Israel in these last days will be divided into three companies ; the major, the Apostate Nation, then the faithful and persecuted remnant who will be martyred, and, lastly, these 144,000 who will be carried through the Great Tribulation unscathed. It is as representative of these last that our Lord appeals in Luke xxi. 36. " Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man." This is, by a completely mistaken exegesis made to mean that the church is to pray *to escape from the great tribulation in the sense of not passing through it*. It can mean nothing of the kind, as the form of the verb " escape " * shews, but *to escape in the sense of passing through it unscathed*. Really the expression " stand before the Son of Man " ought to suffice to keep from the above error. The synoptic prophetic chapters have only to do with the Coming of the Lord in glory to deliver Israel and set up His Kingdom.

THE INNUMERABLE MULTITUDE

After the sealing of the 144,000 we are introduced to the innumerable multitude. This is for an evident reason, if the supposition be right that the multitude represent the fruits of the testimony of the sealed ones, which their just apposition seems to render likely.

* The form of the word in Luke xxi. 36 is " ekpheugo "—to escape out of, after passing through (see Acts xix. 10) ; the other word, meaning to escape even passing through is " apopheugo " (see 2 Pet. i. 4).

These are not of the tribes of Israel but "out of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues." Here is the answer to the question in the previous chapter, "Who shall be able to stand?" These "stand before the throne and before the Lamb." They are clothed with white robes—that is cleansed and made meet for His presence. They have palms in their hands, for they have overcome. They do not ascribe their salvation to themselves, "but to their God . . . and unto the Lamb." Their testimony calls forth the worship of the angelic hosts.

Hitherto we have not seen the elders acting individually. Now one of them divulges to the seer the identity and origin of the great white-robed throng. Whence came they? Out of the great tribulation (lit. the tribulation, the great one). Who are they? "These are they who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." *Therefore* are they before the throne. Blessed title! What else could have given them such a place? What more is needed? They have availed themselves, as self-condemned ones, of the Atoning Sacrifice, and that is enough. True they are not the church—living beings or elders; they are not of the sealed of Israel; they are saved Gentiles; but there is only one ground on which any soul, be he of the church, of Israel or of the Nations can stand before God and that is a Divinely perfect ground—the blood of the Lamb. This also constitutes them servants, guarantees them the Divine presence, provision and protection; for the Lamb, whose blood brought them there, shall feed them and lead them, and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

AFTER the parenthetical seventh chapter, the opening of the seals is resumed. The seventh and last is now broken, introducing the seven trumpets, which are indeed its expression, as later the seventh trumpet introduces the seven vials, which are its expression. We see from this how the judgments grow in intensity as the book proceeds, which alone might shew that it is not the Christian era, which has not been characterized by this. Indeed to confound Apocalyptic times, with the present, is to confound judgment and grace, or "the day of vengeance of our God" with "the acceptable year of the Lord."

As this seventh seal was opened, "there was a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." One would not have thought this presented great difficulties, but those who refuse to recognize the parenthetical character of chapter vii., and regard chapter viii. as running on straight from it, suggest that the "half-hour silence" is "the beginning of the Eternal Rest" (!) of the redeemed, the great multitude of chapter vii., which they interpret as the church—the totality of the saved of all ages! Could confusion be worse confounded? But nothing is too grotesque and fantastic to find favour with the unbridled imagination of some interpreters; and what is worse, they claim to hold the key of prophetic knowledge.

Surely all that is meant is that a brief silence, denoting intense and awestruck expectation, falls on

heaven, as they realize the tremendous issues involved in what is about to happen. A trumpet represents a more public and insistent warning of judgment, than the breaking of a seal and though the repeated phrase "a third part" may restrict the area of the judgments, their character is more severe.

These judgments are only let loose in answer to the prayers of the saints, suffering on the earth, with little doubt the faithful remnant of Israel, and the prayers are in character, for they are not interceding *for* their enemies, as is proper for Christians, but in the spirit of "the imprecatory Psalms" calling down vengeance on them. Naturally to unregenerate or unenlightened ecclesiastics, who ignore all dispensational differences, such psalms as vii., x., lix., xciv., etc., are discounted as "failing to manifest the spirit of *Christian* charity." In fact, God must for ever refrain from punishing evil-doers, if He is to have any claim to be the God of these men (!) But we may be sure that "the day of Vengeance of our God" will be as much an essential part of His Revelation of Himself as "the acceptable year of the Lord" now is. "The altar" is, I believe, that of burnt offering. It is the work accomplished there, which permits the ministry of "the golden altar," that of Incense. We could never know the value of the Person of Christ for intercession, apart from the offering of Himself at "the Brazen Altar." Now the prayers of the saints ascend to God in all the savour of His precious Name, and it is that which ultimately determines the sounding of the trumpets in judgment. But before that again, the action of verse 5 takes place, which seems to denote to the world a foretaste of coming judgment.

Before expounding the events of the chapter, the moment seems opportune to enquire what principles should guide us in interpreting these Apocalyptic

judgments. Should it not be the same that governs the interpretation of prophecy in general, that is to explain literally, as far as possible? This agrees with the title of the Book; the Spirit has given us not a bundle of riddles to solve, but a Revelation to believe. The principle accepted by many seems rather to be to avoid as far as possible the plain sense of words, and in the most fanciful and arbitrary manner to force on the sacred text a reference to historical events down the "Christian" centuries. The literal principle agrees well with the meaning of Old Testament prophecies already fulfilled, *e.g.*, the judgments on Babylon, Tyre, Egypt and on Israel herself.

How exactly and literally these prophecies have been fulfilled! The same holds, even more strikingly, of the Messianic prophecies: the manner of our Lord's birth (Isa. vii. 14); the place of it (Micah. v. 2); His triumphal entry; His betrayal, the price paid, and what became of it (Zech. ix. 9; xi. 12, 13), the manner of His death—the piercing of His hands and feet the parting of His garments; the drinking of the vinegar, etc. (psalms xxii. and lxix.). How unlikely it all seemed to unbelief! "It must mean something quite different, these are figures, symbols, etc." But no, they happened exactly as foretold, and no converted Jew of the Acts period, or Christian since, has had any doubt of their literal fulfilment. If the Apocalyptic scenes had been fulfilled in the Christian era, Christians would be equally unanimous about it. The truth is, not one of these prophecies has yet been fulfilled. The church is not the subject of prophecy, but Israel, and the nations bound up in her judgments or blessing.

In interpreting the trumpets, it is usual with teachers, even those who are right on the main future lines, to attempt to explain the various happenings in a quite indefinite symbolism—of

66 THE VISIONS OF JOHN THE DIVINE

political or governmental movements or catastrophes, and such may be sometimes indicated. But as a fact people at large trouble very little as to who rules over them, as long as food is plentiful and conditions easy.

Physical judgments are what people really mind ; and such, I submit, are what we have here, couched no doubt in symbolic language or according to appearances, as, for instance, when a large part of the sea turns into "*blood*," or when "*blood*" is rained from heaven.

Now the seven angels prepare to sound.

The effect of the first is "hail and fire ' mingled with blood ' " and all vegetation suffers. How this would affect all the cultivators of the earth is clear.

The effect of the second is on the sea.

Why should not this "great mountain " be a gigantic meteor (like the enormous meteoric stone which struck Siberia only a few years ago, digging a huge trench between thirty and forty miles long, burning up whole forests for miles on either side, till it buried itself in a gigantic crater), plunging into the depths of the ocean, with general damage to the fish life and enormous waves of translation, resulting in destruction to shipping. These are the things men care about, because they touch their two most sensitive points, their stomachs and their pockets. Little men reck whether a king or a president rules, as long as the other two fare well. The third trumpet affects the water supplies of the world. What greater calamity could happen ! and the fourth the heavenly bodies, upsetting the order of things and casting gloom over the earth, and to make things blacker, an angelic warning is uttered to the world to expect something worse, " Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpets of the three angels, which are yet to sound ! "

CHAPTER IX

“ THE FIRST TWO WOES ”

THIS chapter contains the sounding of the fifth and sixth trumpets and what comes of it. These constitute the first two of the three woes foretold by the angel in the preceding chapter. As the first trumpet sounded the apostle saw a star fall (Greek, fallen) from heaven unto the earth. This star must be taken figuratively, for it is a personal being as verse 2 shows, “ to *him* was given the key of the bottomless pit ” (Greek, abyss). He is angelic, for he is from heaven ; a rebel, for he is “ fallen ” ; and very powerful, seeing that the key of the bottomless pit is entrusted to him. Can it be anyone less than the great apostate leader, Satan? Isaiah xiv. 12, may be quoted as bearing out this thought : “ How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning ? ” But here he is not seen as cast down into the abyss, but as having power conferred on him to open it. He can now open that fearful prison-house, where he himself will be shut up later for a thousand years (see Rev. xx. 1). Its awe-inspiring character is at once revealed, for as soon as the door opens, a smoke belches forth “ like the smoke of a great furnace.” Here as in a prison awaiting their final doom will be lodged Satan and his angels during the millennial reign of Christ. But not only does smoke emerge, but out of it come locusts, representing, I would suggest, maleficent spiritual beings, till then imprisoned in the abyss, carrying in themselves potent powers of inflicting suffering, only to be likened, on a

natural plane, to the scorpions of the earth. The sting of one of the larger kinds of African scorpion causes three days of intense suffering even to a strong man in full health, as I knew from a specific case, and may prove fatal to persons of weak constitution. They seem to represent fallen spiritual beings, kept in reserve for these terrible times of visitation, but ready to acknowledge Satan's leadership at once when liberated. These demoniacal agencies may be compared to locusts, for prodigious number, ceaseless activity, and insatiable appetite for mischief. If we compare verse 4 with verses 1-3 of chapter vii. it might almost appear that their ministry of torment is chiefly directed against those of the tribes of Israel, who had not been sealed in their foreheads with the seal of the living God, but perhaps it is not necessary to limit it in this way, for though the sealed ones were all of the tribes of Israel, the unsealed would include vastly more than they. When we think of the physical effects often experienced by mediums and others who tamper with demoniacal intercourse, we need feel no surprise that these evil powers should be able to inflict even physical suffering (though I would judge that the description here would include severe moral suffering) though limited in intensity, for it was not to be mortal, and in duration, for it was not to exceed five months. So exquisite will be the anguish that men will seek relief in death, but this will be denied them. The description of these instruments of judgment is very strange and no doubt in a large measure symbolic, but the symbols will clear up when the time arrives and nothing is gained by drawing on our imagination.

Their king is "the angel of the bottomless pit," the very angel I judge, of whom we have read in verse 2, and called so, because of the power conferred

on him to open it. And who else but Satan could be indicated by such names as Abaddon (from Heb. ah-vad—to destroy) and Apollyon—(marg.) the destroyer (from Greek, apollumi—to destroy).¹ Clearly in this woe a Satanic energy is let loose, which accentuates the severity of the judgments, as hitherto experienced. This woe, to judge from the effect of the “sting of the locusts” will last five months.

On the sounding of the sixth trumpet a voice is heard from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel. . . . “Loose the four angels which are bound in the river Euphrates.” Surely this voice of authority must be that of the Lord Himself, and its coming from the altar of incense would indicate, as in chapter viii. 3, that the enactment of the judgment is made to depend on the prayers of the saints of Israel, offered up there. These four angels under restraint must plainly not be confounded with the four restraining angels of chapter vii. 1. These from the fact of their “being *bound* in the river Euphrates” are clearly angelic agencies of harmful character. But for God’s restraining hand the wrath of man and Satan would know no bounds. But “He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him (that is, as far as He permits it to go) the remainder of wrath He will restrain” (Psa. lxxvi. 10). The loosing of these terrible forces is marked by God to the hour, day, month, and year, but it at length arrives. How blessed to know that “He holds the key of all unknown,” that neither a sparrow can fall, nor a demon emerge on his work of destruction, without His knowledge and permission.

These four angels have the power of convoking a huge army to carry out their predestined plans, of which the number is given in the apostle’s hearing at 200,000,000. What these horsemen represent it is difficult to define, but in these days of mechanical

contrivance, when all arms are being "mechanicalized" and infantry is rapidly becoming a thing of the past, they may represent the latest word in motor-driven "tanks" fitted with quick-firing guns of the most deadly pattern, and every device for flame and bomb-throwing, and poison-gas attack. When we are told on the authority of Mr. T. A. Edison that an attack by the most up-to-date poison-gas bombing aeroplanes could account for the whole of London in three hours, it is not surprising to read that by this gigantic army the third part of men were slain. These enormous hecatombs used to sound mythical to unbelief, it need not be so now. These judgments are intended to lead the survivors to repentance, but instead of that we read they repented neither of their sins Godward, "that they should not worship demons and idols, etc.," nor of their sins manward, their murders, sorceries, fornications or thefts. When the grace of God has been despised, did judgment ever produce general repentance among men?

CHAPTER X

THE PARENTHESIS OF THE MIGHTY ANGEL

THIS chapter forms the second parenthesis of the book, falling between the sixth and seventh trumpets, as the first, chapter vii., does between the last two seals. As then the seventh seal expanded into the seven trumpets, so later the seventh trumpet finds its expansion in the seven vials. In other words, the seven trumpets represent the seventh seal and the seven vials represent the seventh trumpet. From this, one characteristic of the book is plainly seen—a growing intensity in the judgments. How then can the third section of the book, forming its main body, portray the Christian era as certain interpreters, called historical, assure us it does. Some assert that the Reformation is in view in this chapter. The only way to find it here is we may be sure to put it in first. But the present era has not been marked with an ever-increasing severity of judgment, and here Israel in the persons of the 144,000 sealed from her twelve tribes will be once more in the place of testimony, which cannot be, as long as the Church is still in this scene. The passage before us assures us that where the events it describes are taking place things will be hastening to their final issue ; a crisis will be imminent ; “ time shall be no longer,” that is “ there shall be no longer delay or postponement.” This was not true at the time of the Reformation, as events have proved.

The chapter naturally divides itself under four heads (1) The vision of the mighty Angel ; (2) His

cry and the utterance of the seven thunders ; (3) The Angel's oath ; (4) The fresh commission of the Apostle.

Who, then, is this "Mighty Angel descending from heaven, clothed with a cloud, a rainbow on his head, his face as the sun and his feet as pillars of fire?" None other, I would submit, than the Glorious Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, though as His literal coming in glory will still be future, He is seen in symbolic guise. There are striking points of contact between this description and previous visions of our Lord, *e.g.* in chapters i. and iv. The same Divine Person had frequently manifested Himself in Old Testament times, as the Angel of the Lord or of the Covenant, distinguished personally from Jehovah and yet equal with and one with Him, and with dignities attaching to Him, as could not well be true of a mere angelic being. One or two instances may suffice: "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Gen. xlviii. 16) (see chap. xxviii. 13, 15; xxxi. 11, 13). "Behold I send an angel before thee" . . . "*beware* of him and *obey* his voice, *provoke him not*; for he will *not pardon* your transgressions: for my name is in him" (Exod. xxiii. 20, 21; xxxii. 34; xxxiii. 13). How could such expressions apply to a mere angelic being? The Angel of the Lord or the Covenant is identified with God Himself in Zech. xii. 8, and with our Lord Jesus Christ in Mal. iii. 1, for the word translated there, "messenger," is *Malakh*, which like the Greek word "*angelos*," has the double meaning of "angel" and messenger. Here the Lord Jesus is plainly called "the Messenger or Angel Whom ye delight in." God never appeared to His creatures except in the Person of the Eternal Son (John i. 18). Those who unhappily deny the Eternal Sonship of Christ and so the Eternal Fatherhood of God of course contest

this, but we are safe in asserting that the Theophanies of the Old Testament were always Christophanies. That this Mighty Angel is Christ is further borne out by a reference to Dan. xii. 6, 7—there he may be identified with “the man in white linen” (the oath of either is almost the same) and so with the Glorious One Who had appeared to Daniel by the river Hiddekel in chapter x.

What is the Book in His hand? However much we value “The Book,” it is not necessary or permissible to find in every mention in the Apocalypse of a book a reference to the Bible. The word here is “*biblaridion*,” the diminutive of a diminutive “*biblarion*.” Here we might translate “a small diminutive scroll.” But though it was not the “Word of God,” no doubt it contained John’s message for his future testimony. The Mighty Angel is described as “crying with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth,” yet another proof of the time indicated. Christ will have put off His Lamb-like character for that of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. It is no longer the gospel of the grace of God, appealing too often to deaf ears, but a cry of judgment, a voice that must be heard, not as now “the acceptable year of the Lord,” but “the day of vengeance of our God.” The voice is followed by “the seven thunders”—the divine sanction of the cry. Not merely “seven thunders,” but “the seven” “in order,” perhaps, as has been suggested “to bring them before us as another order of sevens, in harmony with the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven vials.” It was not merely a sevenfold peal, but the seven thunders which spake distinctly “their own voices.” Thunder represents generally in Scripture the voice of Jehovah in judgment. “The Lord also thundereth in the heavens and the Highest gave His voice” (Psa. xviii. 13). “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters,

the God of glory thundereth, the Lord is upon many waters." (Psa. xxix. 3). Here that glory is revealed in sevenfold majesty. Would not these seven represent even more terrible judgments than any before? The Seer recognizes them as on an equal footing with the previous visions, for he at once proceeds to record their message, but a voice from heaven forbids this: "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered and write them not." This would possibly suggest a mitigation in mercy of threatened judgment (see Matt. xxiv. 22). Their voices may however have had an immediate effect on the faith and courage of the Lord's servant, in view of his future service, "concerning many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (verse 11, R.V. marg.). Now verse 5 takes up again the cry of the Mighty Angel. (1) It was a solemn appeal uttered before God. "He lifted up His hand to God." (2) His word was confirmed by an oath, "by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven and the things that therein are." Who but a Divine Person would dare to swear by God; nor would a Divine Person swear by any other. (3) It was a decisive proclamation "that there should be time no longer"—not, of course, that eternity was at once to ensue, but as has been already noted, that there should no longer be *delay*—but that "in the days of the seventh angel the mystery of God should be finished." It seems like the answer to the words of those under the altar in chapter vi.: "How long, O Lord?" They were told then to wait for a little "space" (same word as "time" here). Now that short delay will soon be exhausted.

CHAPTER XI

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Now what is the Mystery of God ? I think we have the answer in Colossians ii. 2, R.V. "The mystery of God, even Christ." A mystery is not something uncanny or which cannot be explained. The word is never applied to such deep questions as the origin of evil or the doctrine of the Trinity, but has, I believe, always in it the sense of a totally unexpected development (in view of man's failure) of something already known, *e.g.*, "The Mystery of Christ." It was no mystery that the Gentiles should be blessed by and with Israel, but that they should be blessed on equal terms, as members of the same body, that was a mystery (Eph. iii. 5, 6). To grasp what is meant here a simple method suggests itself. The mystery is to be finished, we are told, at the sounding of the seventh trumpet. What, then, is recorded in the next chapter as happening then ? "The kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever." The Lord was born King of the Jews. But His own received Him not. He was rejected by the nation. What, then, is the Mystery ? It is this, that not only will the rejected King inherit the throne of David, but that "His Kingdom will stretch from shore to shore; and more than that, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times, all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" will be "headed up" in one in Him (Eph. i. 10). He will become in fact, as He is in right now, King of Kings

and Lord of Lords, sitting upon the throne of the universe.

The Seer is next directed to go and take the little book and eat it up. This action was already well understood in the Old Testament Scriptures (see Jer. xv. 16; Ezek. iii. 1, 3). The latter passage makes the meaning of the "eating" clear. "Master the message to be better able to deliver it." This means sweetness and bitterness, as many a faithful servant of Christ has experienced.

The next chapter continues the parenthesis already noted and commences the Seer's new commission. A measuring reed is given him by the Angel with instructions how to use it; he is to measure certain limited areas and leave out others: "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, and them that worship therein, but the court which is without the temple leave and measure it not," the reason being that it is still given (which is, I believe, the force of the aorist here) to the Gentiles, etc. Measuring seems to designate effectual possession. You measure what you hold. The area is very different from that revealed to Jeremiah: "The city shall be built to the Lord from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner. And the measuring-line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb and shall compass about to Goath," etc., etc. (chap. xxxi. 38-39). In our chapter only a very small portion is included; the rest is not yet possessed. The recent restoration of the Papal temporal power may illustrate the matter before us. The City of the Vatican consists of a clump of ecclesiastical buildings in which the Papal Power is impersonated and can be treated conventionally as a Sovereign State, so it may be that the Jewish State of this future day will consist of the Temple and precincts, viewed here as distinct from the rest of

Jerusalem, which will still be "trodden down of the Nations," a condition as true to-day under the British Mandate, as under Turkish rule. It would then be with this miniature State that the Seven Years' Covenant will be made, between the Man of Sin—a Gentile—the Imperial Head of the revived Roman Empire, and the Antichrist, a Jew, the false Messiah of the partially restored Jewish nation. When this covenant is broken in the midst of "the week," with the connivance of the Antichrist, there will be no further need for Gentile occupation and the city will be evacuated and handed back to the Antichrist and the apostate part of the nation. The first half of the week, that is 1,260 days, or 42 months, the remaining period of Gentile occupation, will be occupied with the testimony of the two witnesses. It will be God's closing human testimony, and it will need be of extraordinary power. He alone could raise it up and He will have long prepared His instruments. Who are they? The Angel speaks of them as His own: "I will give power unto my two witnesses." Is not this a final proof of the identity of the Angel, with Him, Who, in the days of His flesh, could say to the seventy, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you?" "I give unto you." It must be "the Mighty God" Who speaks thus.

These men are, then, God's own witnesses, they are also prophets, inspired men. They are also said to be the "two olive trees and the two candlesticks or lampstands, standing before the God of the whole earth," which naturally recalls Zechariah's vision of the Golden Lampstand (see chap. iv.). "The olive trees," were there, I suggest, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, through whom the testimony was sustained, here two greater prophets. There, there

was only one lampstand, representing Israel, for strange as it may appear, the separation between Israel and Judah is only regarded as consummated by the crucifixion of their Messiah, for it is only when the staff Beauty is cut asunder that the other staff Bands is also cut asunder, that "I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel" (Zech. xi. 10, 14).

Here the two witnesses represent *two* candlesticks, that is the faithful remnant from Israel and Judah. This final testimony will correspond with the outpouring of the Spirit foretold by Joel and partially fulfilled at Pentecost. It would seem that the 144,000 sealed ones of chapter vii. will be associated with these two, carrying the testimony into all parts of the earth, while they as the heads of the testimony remain at Jerusalem sustaining it and sharing in it.

THE TWO WITNESSES

Who, then, are these mighty prophets? There are reasons for believing that they will have had a previous earthly existence. If so, as they are killed after their testimony, they will have either passed from the earth without dying, or have been brought back from death, like Lazarus, resuscitated, we may say, on to the death plane, for "it is appointed unto men *once* to die," in the strict sense of the word.

Enoch and Elijah are the only two who would meet the first conditions and the character of the days in which they lived and of their testimony (see *e.g.*, Jude xiv. 15), would favour the thought of some that they will be the two witnesses. Certainly, I think there can be no legitimate doubt that Elijah will be one. The Old Testament closes with the striking prophecy, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful

day of the Lord " (Mal. iv. 5). John the Baptist was, no doubt, a figure of Elijah. He came " in his spirit and power " (Luke i. 17) ; of him the Lord said, "*If ye will receive it* (or him) this is Elias " (Matt. xi. 14) ; and even more strongly, " Elias verily cometh first and restoreth all things. . . . Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatever they listed " (Mark ix. 12, 13), though even this must be qualified with the proviso of the previous quotation, "*If ye will receive.*" It seems certain that John did not exhaust the terms of Malachi's prophecy in reference to the literal return of Elijah. Certainly it was not " before the great and dreadful day of the Lord " that the Baptist exercised his ministry. I think Enoch, fully as he meets the conditions up to a certain point, must be ruled out by the fact that he was not of Israel, which this final testimony essentially is, being connected with Jerusalem, etc. But if this be so, there would seem only one other who could suitably fill the role, that is Moses. It is noteworthy that his name is associated with Elias at the close of the Old Testament ; and though he was not caught away without dying, as the other, there are reasons to believe that he must have been brought back to life by Divine power, in the same way as the other cases narrated in the Scriptures, so as to appear on the Mount of Transfiguration. Surely it would have been an anomaly for Moses to be present in spirit merely, with the Lord, and four others in bodies of flesh ! Moreover, the mysterious dispute over his body between Michael and Satan, recorded by Jude (v. 9), must point to something out of the common. Possibly, too, the fact that his grave was only known to God may be explained on the ground that it was to prevent it becoming common knowledge that his body was no longer buried. Moses could not have been raised in

the true spiritual sense of the word, without invading the prerogative of the Lord to be "the firstfruits" of the resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 23). The parallelism between the miraculous powers of Moses and those of the two witnesses, *e.g.*, turning waters into blood and smiting the earth with all plagues cannot fail to be noticed. Two is the number of adequate testimony and these are the leaders associated as has been already remarked, very possibly with others, perhaps with the 144,000 sealed ones of the tribes of Israel. These two are said to be clothed in sackcloth, symbolizing their deep sense of the dishonour done in the earth to God's claims by the general apostasy. One point must be noticed in connection with their being "the two olives which stand before the Lord of the whole earth." In Zechariah's vision, it is from the two olive trees that the oil flows into the lampstand, and thus sustains the testimony. In God's ways with Israel He seems to have used outstanding men like Moses and Elijah as reservoirs of spiritual power. We read, for instance, that "the Lord took of the spirit that was upon Moses and gave it unto the seventy elders" (Numb. xi. 25); it was, moreover, a double portion of Elijah's spirit that Elisha craved. In these days when there is such a thirst for the miraculous, and for supernatural gifts, we may notice that all the miraculous power of Moses did not as far as we know, convert one Egyptian, whereas one question in the power of the Spirit, "Who is on the Lord's side?" was the determining factor in the conversion of the tribe of Levi. Elijah, who seems to have thought that if Jehovah would entrust him with His miraculous power, he could bring back Israel to Him, had to confess that "he was left alone"; whereas God by the still small voice of His Spirit had "reserved to Himself seven thousand men, who had not bowed the knee to the

image of Baal." The same thing was true at Pentecost. The miraculous sights and sounds of the Spirit's presence did not bring one sinner to repentance, whereas the simple testimony of Peter, enforced by the Holy Spirit, led the three thousand to cry out "Men and brethren what must we do?" "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zech. iv. 8). Instead of yearning for miraculous gifts, that are out of our reach, is it not better, to seek by faith and holy living to be filled with the Spirit, which is within the reach of all?

It is clear that the testimony of the witnesses is not Christian, unless, indeed, it be Christian for a preacher of the grace of God to destroy those who reject his message. "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men." And yet the testimony described in our chapter will be none the less Divine and in perfect harmony with the dispensation. These two witnesses are not preaching the gospel of the grace of God, but are witnessing to the coming King and standing for the rights of God in the earth. How essential then to the right understanding of God's ways it is to hold fast dispensational differences! Those to-day, who once seemed to run well, but are now, alas, engaged in breaking down every dispensational boundary, removing, we may say, "the ancient landmarks," do but advertise their lack of spiritual insight, and confuse things that differ. Surely it is not difficult to distinguish the testimony described here from that of our Blessed Lord, Who rebuked the sons of Boanerges, when they would have called down fire from heaven on the Samaritans who refused Him welcome. "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of," said He, "for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Yet here are true servants of the

Lord doing the very thing with Divine approval, which the Lord there condemned.

THE DEATH OF THE TWO WITNESSES AND ITS ISSUE

As long as God lengthens out the testimony of the two witnesses, no opposition can quench it, but "When they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit (Greek, abyss), will make war on them and shall overcome them and kill them." The identity of this sinister personage will be discussed more fully later. It may suffice here to point out that he will be Satan's reply to God's two prophets, in that he, too, will have had a previous earthly existence; a fact which seems clearly indicated by the words "he will ascend out of the bottomless pit," the place where later Satan himself will be temporarily incarcerated during the millennial reign. It is easy to see what universal prestige will accrue to a man able to overcome the hitherto invincible witnesses. If they confessedly operated by the power of God, then his power must be greater still and will seem to justify his claim to be "above all that is called God or that is worshipped."

Now the mighty witnesses lie vanquished. Man and Satan have done their worst on them, and "their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." Even in Old Testament times, Israel had put on much of the character of Egypt in her independence of God, and of Sodom in her corruption (*e.g.*, Isaiah i. 10); here the assimilation is even closer. That Jerusalem is indicated is shewn from the concluding reference to the crucifixion. Their enemies will gloat over their dead bodies and

deny them burial, while "the earth-dwellers" everywhere will make merry over them. It will be a world-wide fête. Before the discovery of "wireless," the possibility of all this taking place within the limits of three and a half days would present a difficulty to unbelief. Now such a "miracle" becomes commonplace, and yet man foolishly denies to the Law-maker Himself the power to "interfere," as they term it, with His own laws, as though we knew them all, or even one exhaustively. Happy it is that He does "interfere" and that constantly, in His own Creation, for else where should we be, who depend on Him for "life and breath and all things?" In this case, as always, the merriment of the world is short-lived and suddenly gives place to fear. The God of resurrection intervenes and publicly vindicates His beloved servants and His own Name. They are once more seen alive, and, in response to a great voice from heaven, "Come up hither," ascend thither in a cloud in the sight of their enemies. The second woe ends in judgment, "there was a great earthquake and the tenth of the city fell," with the resultant death of seven thousand men. This had a salutary effect. Man has not yet attained the full measure of wickedness which he will manifest under the vials when blasphemy will be the only response to God's judgments (chap. xvi. 9, 11, 21). Here we read "the remnant were affrighted and gave glory to the God of heaven." But even then there is no indication of repentance unto life, or recourse to the Lord Jesus.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet introduces the third woe. It is recognized in heaven that a decisive crisis is imminent. God's great purpose throughout the Apocalyptic judgments is to be realized. His kingdom on earth is at length in sight, and, though man's wickedness and Satanic opposition have yet to reach their height, great voices in heaven

proclaim, "The kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever." This evokes a heartfelt response from the twenty-four elders. Though their inheritance is heavenly, their interest is none the less deep in all that concerns the glory of Christ. "They fell upon their faces and worshipped God as "the Lord God Almighty which art and wast and is to come," a title reminiscent of the messages to the seven churches (chap. i. 4, 8), and therefore peculiarly fitted to their lips. The ground of their worship is summed up in the words "because thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned." It was a consummation often longed for; often perhaps had they been tempted to think "He was slack concerning His promise," but they had been assured that it was only His long-suffering that held back His judgment, that "long-suffering of our Lord which is salvation," "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter iii. 9, 15). Now at last the sands of mercy have run out, and nothing remains but wrath. In verse 18, the details are given; the first phrase is significant, denoting that man's iniquity has come to the full, "the nations were *wrathful*," and it is only then that the *wrath* of God is revealed. (It is the same root in each case). The wrath of God meets the wrath of man. What else would now be possible? The next phrase seems to present some difficulty. The words "the time of the dead, that they should be judged" would seem naturally to point to the final judgment of the wicked dead before the great white throne, but that will occur a thousand years later, at the close of the millennial reign. The words would then rather refer to the first resurrection—the dead being those mentioned in chapter xx. 4. This fits in exactly with the next phrase, "and that

Thou shouldst give reward unto Thy servants the prophets and to the saints and to them that fear Thy name," which will mark the allotment to each of a place in the Kingdom, according to his faithfulness. At this moment a significant event occurs in heaven—the temple of God is opened to reveal a certain object, the heavenly counterpart of "the ark of His covenant," consisting as we remember of the ark itself, containing the two tables of the law, of the golden covering and the cherubim, representing the throne of God and its guardians. Hitherto,* the blood on that throne had made it a throne of grace or a mercy-seat. Now there is no blood to meet the eye of God or man, and the claims of God's throne must be vindicated. Hence the ominous signs which follow—no longer the call of mercy and grace, but "lightnings and voices and thunderings and an earthquake and great hail."

* Strictly speaking, the Lord, bearing the marks of Calvary, replaces the blood on the mercy-seat.

CHAPTER XII

“ THE DAY OF JACOB’S TROUBLE ”

THIS chapter introduces the third parenthesis in the book, between the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the resultant judgments—the outpouring of the seven vials in chapter xvi. Not that the events of chapters xii.-xiv. may not be going on during the vials, on the contrary, I believe they give us three *tableaux* of this whole period, the second half of the last seven years, the most pregnant with persecution by man and with judgment from God in the world’s history. Iniquity will have come to the full. Satan will be cast out from his heavenly sphere on to the earth, the Man of Sin and the Antichrist will rise to the zenith of their power, and then, in chapter xv., there will be a winding up of things, the first-fruits of the harvest of the earth reaped and the vintage gathered in: this last the cutting off of His enemies by the Son of Man. This period, if viewed from Israel’s standpoint, will be the day of Jacob’s trouble; this we have in chapter xii.; but if viewed from Satan’s it will be the culmination, as in chapter xiii., of the creature’s rebellion; and then if viewed from the Divine standpoint, in chapters xiv.-xvi., God’s final appeal to man and the actual outpouring of His judgments upon the world. In point of time the chapters may be synchronous. Our chapter begins with the sign in heaven of “a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown (*stephanos* or victor’s crown) of twelve stars,” all clearly reminiscent of Joseph’s dream of

the future glory of the Ruler greater than he. Here we have, I believe, "the daughter of Zion" (see Jer. iv. 31; vi. 23, 24)—Israel, as seen in God's purpose, according to His ideal, with His glory upon her to be surely realized in His time according to the Word: "Thy maker is thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is His name, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. The God of the whole earth shall He be called" (Isa. liv. 61). It is remarkable but characteristic that God is pleased to make this revelation of what He will have Israel for ever, just as she is about to enter on the darkest hour of her history. "Alas, for that day is great, *so that none is like it*. It is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. xxx. 7; see also v. 6). This will synchronize with the more general "great tribulation." "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. xxiv. 21). So terrible indeed will it be that God in mercy to His elect will cut it short.*

Now if the woman be Israel, who is the man child? The reply with scarcely a dissentient voice will be, the Lord Himself, who else could it be? Will it not be He, who "rules the nations with a rod of iron?" Certainly He will do so, if we may, as seems probable, take the "break" of Psalm ii. 9 as equivalent to "rule." "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron." But even this is hardly conclusive, for one of the promises to the overcomer of Thyatira is, "He shall rule them (the nations) with a rod of iron," so that the Lord will not be alone in this. This view also demands that the Spirit of God, for some reason, which one has not heard explained, should

* Perhaps this is the reason why the duration of the closing period seems to be given as 2300 days instead of 2520, which would be the length of seven full years (Dan. viii. 14).

suddenly go back two millenniums to the Incarnation. Would it be likely that such a transcendent and unique event should be described as here? Why, too, should no reference be made to His ministry, death and resurrection, were the Lord in view? Many honoured teachers seem satisfied with the usual interpretation, so that one hesitates dogmatically to pronounce a contrary judgment. My own belief is that it is much more in harmony with the period in view in this chapter as a whole to see in this "man-child" a select company from Israel, who will have been associated, say, with the testimony of the Two Witnesses, and will, like them, be caught away from the evil to come. Satan would fain have destroyed the infant Jesus by the murderous hand of Herod, but could it have been in the character he is displayed in here, as a "great red dragon" having seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns (diadems) upon his heads. Unless it were in anticipation he could not be seen so until the revival of the Roman Empire, which is seen arising from the sea in chapter xi. 1 as the personification of himself. Where have we anything in the gospel history corresponding to the woman fleeing into the wilderness to be fed 1260 days, the same period again, described elsewhere as forty and two months or three and a half years.

Now the time has come for another stage in the abasement of Satan. "The wheels of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small."

"There was war in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, the dragon fought and his angels; and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven." That no doubt should exist as to the personality and identity of this terrible personage, or excuse to those who deny his existence, he is described in a fourfold way, first in fully developed depravity, the whilom cherub has become

a *dragon* ; in his devious ways, with his black record behind him, *that old serpent* ; in his unprincipled methods—" *called the devil* " the accuser of the brethren of what he has seduced them to ; lastly, in his deadly opposition to God and His truth *Satan* the adversary, " going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." We do well strenuously to avoid that worldly spirit which treats this terrible being as a subject for jesting. Better joke about your would-be murderer than of him. Hitherto, Satan's seat has been in the heavenlies with, of course, free access to earth, now he will be confined to earth.

His ejection from heaven with his angels calls for a fresh pæan of praise from thence, for one more step in advance has been taken in the accomplishment of the Divine purposes. He can no longer accuse the saints before God. They had overcome him, as we must, by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and their devotion unto death. Now the conflict is past. But heaven's gain is earth's woe. The presence of Satan will give a special terror to the last woe, for he has " great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time."

Baulked of his prey—" the man child," he persecutes the mother who had given it birth. The next verse shews that verse 6 had anticipated events, for it is only after his precipitation to the earth that Satan persecutes the woman and that she flees into the wilderness, a flight foretold in Matt. xxiv. 20. Satan raises up an enemy who is likened to a flood, perhaps " the flood of mighty waters," " the overflowing scourge " of Isa. x. 26 ; xxviii. 2, 15. But " when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him " (Isa. lix. 19). Accordingly the woman will be preserved. She would thus represent the spared remnant, but " the rest of her seed," representing the

scattered remnant throughout the world will not be spared, for we read "the dragon was wroth . . . and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." No doubt these persecuted ones are on Jewish ground, they keep the commandments, they have the prophetic Scriptures which witness to Jesus Christ, for "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (chap. xix. 10). He is the One to Whom all prophecy points. Let us seek ever to keep Him before us in meditating this Book of His coming glories.

CHAPTER XIII

" INIQUITY COME TO THE FULL "

THIS chapter represents in the main the same period as the twelfth, that is the latter part of the last week of Daniel. In chapter xii. there is an introduction, and so here, describing the rise of the man of sin, and it would seem that it is only when the slaying of the two witnesses is achieved (see chap. xi. 7), that he will receive the universal kingdom. " He is given to make war with the saints to overcome them," and then receives world-wide power over " all kindreds and tongues and nations." This chapter then describes the climax of man's defiance of God and self-exaltation under the leadership of the dragon.

The Cross revealed fully what was in man. Murderous hatred to God was there expressed to the full, for " they killed the Prince of life." The happenings of this chapter reveal man's pride. Satan's seduction in Eden is now to bear full fruit. Man's disobedience in Eden was really a challenge to God's supremacy; this is the consummation. Man will set himself forth as God. The first words of the chapter are better rendered as in Aleph, A and C MSS. " He (the dragon) stood upon the sand of the sea"—and then no doubt in obedience to his will and energy a monster emerges from the sea—the restless, rebellious nations, which the apostle describes as a beast (*therion*)—a wild beast " rising out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of " blasphemy." This is a *replica* of the great

red dragon of chapter xii. except that here the horns are crowned. No doubt this revival is now in preparation ; there are signs that the Roman Empire is shortly to be re-formed ; men are talking of the possibility of a United States of Europe, the League of Nations seems its forerunner. The dictators now ruling in some countries, who are really *de facto* uncrowned kings, will probably become the rule in every country. Later it is more than probable that these will become crowned kings, as in chapter xvii., the ten horns are seen as kings—but they will continue to give their power to a greater than they, and he will be their Head. This monstrous empire—the fourth beast of Daniel—will combine certain characteristics of the preceding empire. It will be mainly like the third—the Grecian leopard—in the rapidity of its rise and development ; but its feet will be as the feet of the Medo-Persian bear—for it will embody the crushing strength of that empire ; then it will also have the mouth of the Babylonian lion—for it will be characterized by fierce, autocratic fury against all who oppose it. It will terrify its enemies, as when a lion roareth. Not only so ; it will be directly energized by Satan himself in some peculiar way, for “ the dragon gave it his power and seat and great authority.”

We must now enquire who are the seven heads. To answer this we must refer to chapter xvii. 9, where we learn that they have a double meaning—representing either the seven mountains on which the woman of that chapter sitteth, the woman being then a system connected with the seven-hilled city of Rome, or else seven rulers of the Roman Empire, of whom writes the apostle “ five are fallen, and one is (that is the Emperor Domitian, who was reigning during John’s exile), and the other is not yet come ; and when he cometh he must continue a short space ”

(verse 10). They are clearly not contemporaneous, like the ten kings, but are successive, though not actually consecutive. "All bear the name of blasphemy"; that is, I take it, all assume in their turn divine honours. This was true of such emperors as Nero and Caligula and Domitian. It is said that the last-named insisted on being styled by his provincial governors "Lord God Domitian." The seventh could not be the Papacy as some have asserted, for that has continued 1500 years, whereas the seventh head "will be for a little space." Nor does she claim to be God,* but only the vice-gerent of Christ. The seventh head claims our special attention for he will be wounded to death by a sword (see verse 14), and his deadly wound will be healed. In Rev. i. the Lord describes Himself as "He that liveth and was dead and is alive for evermore." This is characteristic of the Lord throughout the book. He has been through death, but is now alive again. In chapter v. 6, he is seen "Standing as a Lamb that had been slain." The word for "slain" is the sacrificial word (*esphagmenon*) and the word translated here "*wounded* to death" is the same—*esphagmenēn*, so that the parallel is clear. It is Satan's travesty of the resurrection; the seventh head becomes his risen man and from this moment the beast as a monstrous revived system, is personified in the beast, the resurrected head. This resurrection seems to embody a double miracle, the then ruler of the revived Roman Empire—the Emperor President, we may say, will be wounded to death by a sword—assassinated, in other words, and then miraculously brought to life. The electrifying bulletin will circle the globe. "The Emperor is raised again to life," his mortal wound will have been healed by the

* This is true, though the title "Our Lord God the Pope" is not an unknown title, but is intended representatively.

Dragon's power and men will worship the Dragon, as the great life-giver. But there will be a second miracle as astounding as the first, though not so manifest to the world at large, the spirit of one of the previous heads of the Empire, and who will have been, perhaps for centuries, in the bottomless pit (see chap. xi. 7), will be brought out thence by Satan and will energize the resurrected "beast," who will thus become the eighth head. Indeed, we learn from chapter xvii. that one of the strange characteristics of the eighth head, is that he will be one of the previous seven, brought back to play yet another role in the last days. This eighth head energized by Satan, indwelt by some wicked spirit, will be "the Man of Sin," whose advent the apostle Paul foretells in no uncertain tones. He "the son of perdition who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. ii. 4).

"THE RISE OF THE LITTLE HORN"

The importance of the role to be enacted in the final drama of this world's sinful history by the first beast of Revelation xiii., seems to justify our considering further his identity. Light is afforded on this sinister personage, for he is undoubtedly the subject of Old Testament prophecies, from Daniel vii. The fourth great Gentile power, the Roman Empire, is there described somewhat differently from here, and naturally so, for there we see it in its first historic development, "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly," and as "diverse from all the beasts that were before it" (v. 7), but still more will it manifest these terrible features in its revived state, as it is soon now to appear, and in addition it

will exhibit certain characteristics of the three preceding empires.

The ten horns mentioned in Daniel are "ten kings, which shall arise" (v. 24). Here we have further details as to the rise of the little horn, who will become the eighth of head the Empire. The ten horns or kings will rise first, forming a "league of nations" on equal terms, that is apparently without any Imperial head. Outside their ranks, "a little horn" will arise, the ruler of some small country, not included in their confederacy, and through him, in a lightning campaign, which will apparently take every one by surprise, and be finished before the League can collect their senses and resources to defend their colleagues, three of the ten horns will be plucked up; though I think it is clear from Rev. xiii. 17, that they will be replaced by fresh kings, so that the number ten will be preserved. This victorious "little horn" will then become the Seventh Head—the Imperial President of the latter day confederacy. This President will be assassinated with the sword, but his deadly wound will be healed, as we have already seen, and he will then become in his "resurrected" state the eighth head. The description of this "little horn" in Dan. vii. 20-21, 25, corresponds so closely with that of the beast in Rev. xiii. 5-7, as to shew conclusively that they are identical—there is a mouth speaking great things "in both, also, blasphemies or great words against God; in both he makes war with the saints, in both his power is to last for forty-two months (*i.e.*, three and a half years) or "a time, times and the dividing of time." The question next arises whether "the little horn" of chapter viii. is the same as this one. Without wishing to dogmatize it seems difficult to believe otherwise, for the role assigned to it in taking away the daily sacrifice is exactly that of the Prince of the Roman

Empire, who will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease (compare Dan. viii. 11 with ix. 27). This Prince seems clearly identical with the first beast of Rev. xiii. Why, then, should we have two accounts of the same terrible person? Because it is important to know whence he will arise. Chapter vii. 8, merely says, "there came up among them," that is, he will be a kinglet of some unimportant territory of the Empire; but chapter ix. tells us that this will have formed part of one of the four subdivisions of the Grecian Empire, *in the latter time of their Kingdom*, say Syria, for example, the King, of whom Antiochus Epiphanes (176-164 B.C.) in his wickedness, and hatred of God was a worthy precursor—the Man of Sin. The country of this little horn will be quite subordinate, too small to take place among the members of the ten-kingdomed confederacy, but big enough to produce "the little horn," the man of destiny, as the unimportant island of Corsica was to produce the great Napoleon. He will suddenly spring into great prominence, as we have already seen, by his brilliant victories. As nothing succeeds like success, this worldly confederacy of nations will have no difficulty in believing that it will be to their advantage (and what worldly motive can be higher than that?) to grant this successful filibuster of such outstanding military genius the top place.

Satan has always succeeded best among men in his opposition to God by imitation. For every work of God he has produced a counterfeit. At the very outskirts of Eden we see Cain offering a counterfeit of the true, Abel's slain victim. Satan has a kingdom of darkness organized on the lines of God's Kingdom; he has his hierarchies of fallen angels, his principalities and powers; he has his city Babylon to oppose the city Jerusalem; he has the system,

the great whore Babylon, to travesty and persecute the church—the bride of Christ; he will have his counterfeit peace with which to lull men in fancied security, the very peace which men are boasting is in sight to-day. But when they shall say, “peace and safety,” then sudden destruction cometh upon them . . . and they shall not escape. But the greatest of all Satanic counterfeits are before us in this chapter, the first beast, the Man of Sin—dead and risen—in whom Satan will manifest himself, and the second beast, the Antichrist, the false Messiah and King of Israel. Many Old Testament saints pointed on typically to Christ, but to none could God give His Spirit without measure and uninterruptedly till the Antitype came—the Eternal Son, made flesh, who could and did fulfil all His will. So, on the Satanic plane, there have been great sons of Belial, men of sin from Nimrod onwards, mighty leaders, gifted statesmen, world conquerors, precursors of the Man of Sin, but not one has arisen to whom Satan could make the offer he made in vain to our Lord, of universal dominion. In this chapter the hour strikes and the man of destiny is there—a man after Satan’s own heart, corresponding to his ideal as no one before, the very superman of evil—the incarnation of Satanic power. This mystery of iniquity doth already work, only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way; the apostasy will come to full fruition (and we see it ripening around us to-day on every hand). “And then shall that Man of Sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he as god sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is god . . . even he ‘whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs of lying wonders,’ and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in

them that perish: because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. ii. 3, 9-12).

This terrible being will be characterized by sin, lawlessness, and pride, the exact opposite of the sinless, obedient, self-humbled One, Who only sought the glory of the Father. The dragon and he will become the dual objects of man's worship and boasting. Not only will he receive power from the dragon, but also a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, thus becoming a channel of hatred and dishonour to God, even as the Lord Jesus was of thanksgiving and glory.

"ANTICHRIST SHALL COME"

The first beast will receive universal dominion (v. 7), but not universal worship. Only those will worship him who are described here as "All that dwell upon the earth, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (v. 8). We might read this verse more correctly "whose names were not written from the foundation of the world, in the book of life of the Lamb slain." This sense is shewn to be the right one by chapter xvii. 8, where the last words "of the Lamb slain" are omitted. It is the inscribing of the names, not the slaying of the Lamb, which is described here as in the foreknowledge of God. The latter bearing is the subject of 1 Peter i. 20. Who are these earth-dwellers? In verse 6 reference has been made to the "heaven-dwellers"—but there the word was, "to fix their tabernacle." (Skeenöo—

agreeing with "His tabernacle.") The hatred of the beast, energized by Satan, has expressed itself against such, they are the heavenly saints; but here the word for dwellers is Katoikeo, "to take up permanent abode." The unregenerate are indigenous to the earth; they know no better home, nor long for any other. This does not characterize the saints of any age. On the contrary, they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth. Like Abraham, they "seek a country," for their "names are written in heaven."*

Verse 9 is as an encouragement and warning to the persecuted saints. Those who lead them into captivity or who slay them with the sword, will meet a like fate, and the same must apply to them, if under the terrible pressure of persecution they resort to any violent resistance of evil. This double consideration will produce in the saints patience under persecution and faith in God.

We now come to the rise of the second beast, or Antichrist, who is of course to be clearly distinguished from the first beast. For one thing he rises from the earth, the other from the sea—the seething, troubled

* The Lord used this expression of the Seventy, "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke x. 20). The expression, "blotted out of the book of the living," Psa. lxxix. 28, seems only to mean "cut off from this scene," which, I cannot help thinking, was the meaning of Moses' prayer (Exod. xxxii. 32). He was merely praying to be taken away, as Elijah later. "The book" of Dan. xii. 1, referring, as it does, to the same period as Rev. xiii. seems the same as the "book of life of the Lamb" here and in Rev. xvii. 8. In Phil. iv. Paul speaks of "Clement and others whose names are in the 'Book of Life.'" To the overcomer of Rev. iii. 5, is promised, "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life," which does not mean that the name of any true Christian will ever be blotted out, but just the contrary, the emphasis is not on "his," but on "not"—which is the strong double negative of "I will in nowise cast out," or "I will never leave thee, nor ever forsake thee." Rev. xxii. 19 ought to be tree (not book) of life (see R.V.). This seems to be the general, all-inclusive Book, for it is that which will be opened at the Great White Throne Judgment. There may be chapters in it, with other titles, but this includes them all.

sea of the nations. The "earth" is, I believe, "the land," that is the Holy Land; which accords well with the facts as recorded. Our Lord's words look forward to this crisis: "I am come in My Father's name and ye receive Me not; another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John v. 43).

This evil personage, who will play such a leading part in the closing drama of the world's history, is foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures. Genesis, the book of beginnings, seems to hint at his coming in chapter xlvii. 17. In verse 10 Jacob has dwelt with exultation on the coming of the true Messiah, "The Sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet (that is, he shall never forfeit his prerogative as royal tribe, as Reuben, Simeon and Levi had lost their privileges), until Shiloh come, and to Him shall the gathering of the people be"; but in speaking to Dan, Jacob ends on a very different note. "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward," as will the apostate nation of Israel. If this refers to the Antichrist, and it has not yet been fulfilled to the tribe of Dan historically, as far as we know, the next verse represents the prayer of the persecuted remnant faithful to Jehovah, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord" (v. 18). How well this exemplifies "the patience and faith of the saints." For Antichrist will betray the faithful remnant, as Judas betrayed the Lord. We seem to have a reference to both betrayals in Psalm lv. Verses 11-14 are usually taken to refer to Judas; verses 20, 21, refer to another traitor more powerful than he: "He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him, he hath broken his covenant." Then again he seems to be brought prominently before us in Dan. xi.

as the vile (or contemptible, R.V.) person obtaining the Kingdom by flatteries (v. 21), and then entering peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province (*i.e.*, Palestine), and he will adopt a method unknown to his fathers, namely, purchase the suffrages of his fellow countrymen by a liberal partition of the spoils. This expression "his fathers" seems to point to what is from other considerations undoubtedly the fact, that this false king will be a Jew. It is inconceivable that the Jewish nation, with their deep racial prejudices and pride, would ever accept a Gentile as their national Messiah. At the beginning of his career he will be, it would seem, an orthodox Jew professedly revering Jehovah and His ordinances. This is seen in his outward resemblance to Christ, "he had two horns like a lamb," but in his heart he will be like his master, "he spake as a dragon." Certainly, he will be a party to the covenant with the Man of Sin guaranteeing to the Jews national status and religious liberty. But in the midst of the week he, in collusion with the Man of Sin, will break the covenant. This will ensue on a successful campaign against the King of the South (vv. 25-29); then in verse 30, "he shall have indignation against the holy covenant" . . . and they (he and those who will have already forsaken the holy covenant) shall take away the daily sacrifice and shall place the abomination that maketh desolate." This the Lord refers to as "When ye shall see the abomination of desolation (or of the desolator) standing where it ought not," or "in the holy place" (Matt. xxiv. 15; Mark xiii. 14). What this abomination will be, we shall see later. In verse 36, he is fully manifested in his true character. John is the only New Testament writer who specifically indicates the Antichrist. In 1 John ii. 18, we gather from what is said of his forerunners, that he begins, as we

have seen, as a worshipper of Jehovah, for the many Antichrists of whom John speaks were once among the people of God. The most active opponents of the faith to-day are men who have apostatized from the faith, they are to be found in the pulpits, professional chairs, theological seminaries, and missions of Christendom ; they still, indeed, bear the name of Christ, " but they speak as the dragon." They are Antichrists ; they " deny the Father and the Son " (1 John ii. 22). Their Christ is " another Jesus " ; " This is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come " (chap. iv. 3).

This second beast " exercises all the power of the first beast," because empowered by the same terrible spirit—the dragon, but he uses not the power for himself, but " before the first beast " (even as the Lord sought the glory of the Father in all things), and " causeth the earth, and those which dwell therein to worship the first beast whose deadly wound was healed." From Dan. xi. 36, we learn that he, too, will claim divine honours—" he will magnify himself above every god and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods" . . . " neither shall he regard the God of his Fathers . . . nor regard any god : for he shall magnify himself above all." But there will be a deity, he will recognize and honour—the " God of forces "—the mighty head of the revived Roman Empire in all its worldly glory and military power, even the first beast.—" A strange god, whom he shall acknowledge and increase with glory " (v. 39). Thus is completed the crowning blasphemy of Satan, the travesty of the Holy Three in One and One in Three, the first beast representing the Father, the central object of universal worship ; the second beast the Son, the active agent through whom that worship is offered ; and the Dragon, the Satanic Spirit, indwelling and

energizing the other two. This is indeed the mystery of iniquity to which the world is fast hastening to-day.

"THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY"

We have seen that the second beast, in contrast with the first, bears a religious character, a certain outward resemblance to Christ. He will become "the false prophet" of the system, and as such, he is known later. His dominating purpose will be the exaltation of the first beast, and for that he is vested by Satan with miraculous powers, whereby to deceive "the earth-dwellers" and lead them to acknowledge the other as the *only God*. In these days there is a very weighty lesson to be learnt from all this. Much importance is attached to the miraculous, not only in the world as such, in the spiritist cult, which though mixed up with fraud, is undoubtedly a dread Satanic reality, leading its votaries straight to the pit, but also in the religious world, where high value is attributed to what is termed "faith-healing" and "miraculous speaking in tongues." But miracles in themselves do not prove Divine intervention. There are superhuman powers in the world, which can work the miraculous, other than the Divine, recognized in the Scriptures and down the ages as Satanic, and connected with magic and black art.

It is true that our Lord could not have been the Messiah without miracles, for such were foretold of Him (*e.g.*, in Isa. lxi). They were thus an important credential of His Messiahship. "I have greater witness than that of John for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me" (chap. v. 36). "The works that I do in My

Father's name, they bear witness of Me " (John x. 25).

And at Pentecost Peter cites this credential: " Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by *miracles and wonders and signs*, which God did by Him in the midst of you " (Acts ii. 22). These same words describe the Satanic energy enduing the beasts (2 Thess. ii. 9).

This miracle-working energy will have already been prominent throughout this closing period, for we read in Matt. xxiv. 24, " For there shall arise false *Christs* and false *prophets*, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." This culminates in the powers of the second beast. " He doeth great wonders so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." This outstanding miracle, giving apparently the most undeniable proof of Divine intervention, was thrice performed by Elijah, once to prove that Jehovah was God, and twice that he was a man of God. This sign seems to have been " the sign from heaven," the Jews asked more than once from Christ, but which He refused. His virgin birth had been the greatest of all signs " in the depth or in the height above " (Isa. vii. 11-14). He would only give that generation one more, the sign of the prophet Jonas, and one now remains, " the sign of the Son of Man "—that is Himself coming in the clouds. This awe-inspiring miracle—fire from heaven, must convince all of the deity of the Man of Sin. Could the apostate nation refuse such a proof? The elect remnant alone, sustained by Divine grace, will continue to resist his claims.

This miracle leads on to another, as yet unheard of. The earth-dwellers are directed to make an image of the first beast, which had " the wound,"

etc. (lit. *has it—i.e.*, the scar and effects are still visible, a withered arm and a blinded eye—Zech. xi. 17). Perhaps the reason why men are requested to make the image themselves, is that they may be fully convinced of the genuineness of the succeeding miracles, the final proof that their God is the true Creator and Life-Giver, and that there is no trickery or machinery to produce effects, which in these days of wireless, records, talking pictures, would be commonplace. Now comes the climax; the second beast has power to communicate to what all know is only a piece of inanimate matter, a threefold capacity, to breathe, to speak, and to inflict death on as many as would not worship the image of the beast.

But how are worshippers to be distinguished from those who have refused to worship?

God had sealed His servants with His name, now the servants of the new god must receive his mark. "He (that is the Antichrist) causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand (they are the more secret disciples), or in their foreheads (the open and unabashed)." The sign to be received varies, too, it may be simply "the mark," whatever that may be, or "the name of the beast," in full or the numerical value of that name. Such and only such may buy or sell, the rest will be "boycotted." The tremendous pressure, moral and material, which will be brought to bear by Satan in this time of great tribulation is evident.

"Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast for it is the number of a man." Many have attempted the problem, but not having understanding, have hitherto all failed. Perhaps, too, they have failed, because they have tried to *prophesy*, with "the number of the beast," and it is not given for that end. When the

man of destiny arrives, his identity will be fixed by this number, which his name will clearly bear. It is the numerical value of two Greek letters, ch, x, and stav added together—666—the climax of man.

CHAPTER XIV

PENTECOST FULFILLED

THIS chapter marks an important crisis in the ways of God. It is the true Penetecostal Antitype.* The atmosphere of the thirteenth chapter differs from this as chill winter from the mild monitions of spring. There the apostle saw wild beasts, here he sees *the* Lamb ; there he beheld men marked with the name of the beast, here with the Father's name written in their foreheads ; there Satan is in the zenith of his rebellion, and the remnant are suffering, here God asserts His sovereign power, and the remnant are at rest ; there the earth-dwellers worship the beast, here they are plunged into the winepress of God's wrath. " The day of vengeance is in His heart and the year of His redeemed is come." God once more proves that He has everything in hand, a fact that Satan and the world deny, but which God's people should never allow themselves to doubt, however dark appearances may seem. According to one of our own poets :

" Truth is ever on the scaffold,
Wrong is ever on the throne,
Yet behind, within the shadow—
Stands God, watching o'er His own."

We must not regard chapter xiv. as merely succeeding chronologically the last, but as parallel with it and going on further even to the judgment of the nations round about Jerusalem.

* Without prejudice to the fact that the Church was born at Pentecost, there was a distinctly Jewish side to the Day. It was a Jewish feast, at which a Jewish prophecy was fulfilled for believing Jews.

It is indeed a reviving sight which meets the apostle's eye. He had seen Satan's counterfeit, "that spake like a dragon," now he sees the One in Whom all the purposes of God are centred, and in the character in which they are secured—THE LAMB. "And I looked, and lo, *the** Lamb stood on Mount Sion, and with Him 144,000 having His Father's name written in their foreheads." The scene is "that Zion the place of promised blessing on the earth, the metropolis of past and future national glory." The centre of the Kingdom in the halcyon days of David and Solomon, it stands as the symbol of the glories of the coming Kingdom. Clearly the vision here is anticipatory, as it will not be till His coming in glory, that Christ will literally be seated there. Who the 144,000 are will be considered later. They have His Father's (not theirs) name written in their foreheads, as though they did not, as a company, rise to the full height of the spirit of adoption. Next the apostle is attracted by two sounds from heaven: "A voice as the voice of many waters and as the voice of great thunder," which can, I believe, be only the voice of God Himself (see chap. i. 15 and Psal. xxix. 3), and then "the voice of harpers harping with their harps." They sing a new song, for they are a new company, saved from conditions hitherto unknown. They and the 144,000 are in close sympathy, for these alone of all creation can learn their song. Must they not have passed through the same tribulation? But while the one company has come through unscathed, they have sealed their testimony with their blood.

Who, then, are the 144,000 sealed ones? The verses that follow describe their moral characteristics. They are *saints* of God, for they have walked in separation from the allurements of the world and

* The full weight of authority is in favour of the definite article here.

preserved their virgin character. They are *servants* of the Lamb, for they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, according to His own rule. "If any man serve Me let him follow Me," and now they are with Him as He promised. They are His *property*, for they belong to Him, by purchase (agorao) they are "the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb"—that is of the coming harvest. They are *disciples*, for they have learned of Him and are like Him, "Israelites, indeed, in whom is no guile," for in their mouth was found no guile, for they are* without blemish.†

Who, then, do these 144,000 represent? If not identical with the 144,000 sealed ones from Israel of chapter vii., they at least represent a similar company; a faithful remnant of Israel. I am inclined to believe they are the same. In chapter vii. they are sealed for safety, here accordingly they have come through the tribulation safely. It can be shewn that chapter vii. is largely anticipatory, so that it may be much nearer chapter xiv. than might appear. The slight differences as to "sealing" and "written" are more questions of expression than vital. Here in chapter xiv. these persons have been "counted worthy to escape all the things which our Lord warned them were coming on the earth and to stand before the Son of Man" (see Luke xxi. 36). Certainly they have no connection with the church,

* The word translated here, "amomos," is employed only in six other places in the New Testament: Eph. i. 4; Col. i. 22; Eph. v. 27; Heb. ix. 14; Jude xxiv.; 1 Pet. i. 19. It refers originally to the absence of blemish in a sacrificial victim when cut open for inspection, which might render it unfit to be offered. It stands for absence of internal blemish (where "aspilos" (see again 1 Peter i. 19), does for "external spot"). It ought never to be translated "blameless," but rather "unblemished." There is, as here, another word, "amemptos" (see Luke i. 6; Phil. ii. 15), meaning "unblamed"; never applied to our Lord, for He was constantly though unjustly blamed: "They laid to My charge things that I knew not."

† The words, "before the throne of God," are an interpolation, being omitted by best MSS. The 144,000 are seen on earth, not in heaven.

which will long before have left this scene. Besides, the church is not "the first-fruits" of her dispensation; "*Christ the first-fruits*, afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. xv. 23). Here Christ represents the first-ripe *barley*-sheaf waved before the Lord on the Resurrection morn (Lev. xxiii. 10, 11). Then later, came the offering at the feast of Pentecost of the first-fruits of the *wheat* harvest—"the two wave loaves of two tenth deals" (v. 17), adequate testimony of the harvest to follow. These are represented by the 144,000 sealed ones. They had "escaped all the things which had come on the earth," not like the church, by being taken away from the evil to come, but by being preserved through it. This latter is the meaning of the prayer above referred to, in our Lord's prophetic discourse in Luke xxi.

THE FINAL TESTIMONY

From the triumph of God's grace in the final deliverance of the 144,000 our thoughts are brought back to God's final testimony to a rebellious world, before the pouring out of the vials of His wrath. This testimony is threefold, an exhortation, a proclamation, and a warning, and in each case by the intermediary of angels; and there is a good reason why it should be so, for during the great tribulation direct human testimony will be impossible. Angels play a notable part in the book and I see no reason to doubt the superhuman character of this final testimony.

"And I saw *another* angel" (in contra-distinction, I suggest, to the last angel mentioned in chapter xi. 15, the sounder of the seventh trumpet—Michael's angels not coming into the reckoning) "fly in the midst of the heaven having the (Greek omits) ever-

lasting gospel to preach to the earth-dwellers" (*i.e.*, the nations more actively engaged within the limits of the Roman Empire), and also "to every nation and kindred and tongue and people" (*i.e.*, the rest of the world). It is God's last appeal to man, reduced to its simplest requirements. "Fear God and give glory to Him and worship Him that made heaven and earth and the sea and the fountains of water." If any one should enquire in what the "gospel" of this message consists, the answer would be that in these last terrible times God's requirements of man, as proof of repentance and allegiance to Himself, are brought down to an acknowledgment of His creatorship. Though the word "gospel" does not occur in the Old Testament, the silver line of the gospel runs through the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation, as well as from Matthew to Revelation. It varies in its manifestations, but is always the same in its real substance, the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, for apart from Him there never was, nor could be any "gospel." The gospel was preached to Abraham, "In thee (that is 'in his seed which is Christ') shall all nations be blessed" (see Gal. iii. 8). To Israel also, "Unto us was the gospel preached, *as well as unto them*" (Heb. iv. 2), that is the gospel of Canaan rest, type of rest in Christ "which remaineth to the people of God" (v. 9). Further, there is the gospel of the Kingdom, which our Lord preached (Matt. iv. 23; ix. 35), and which will be preached again in the last evil days of Israel's testimony (Matt. xxiv. 14). "The Kingdom of Heaven (of which Christ is the King) is at hand," but, of course, only on the ground of atonement and over a repentant nation. This is to be carefully distinguished from the gospel of the grace of God (Acts xx. 21). No phase of the gospel, whether preached before, or under law, or in the

present dispensation could be realized, except on the basis of the death and resurrection of Christ, and it is only in the gospel of the grace of God that this is fully revealed. All these presentations of the gospel will be superseded in the last phase by the simple appeal to recognize the Creator-glory of God. Why it is called an "everlasting gospel" may not be at first sight plain, it may be because from the beginning before God was revealed in His redemptive character the creature was always responsible to glorify Him as Creator; and here God's requirements are once more reduced to this their simplest expression. It is scarcely needful to point out how the whole hypothesis of evolution, confessedly without an iota of scientific proof, is a pseudo-scientific, anti-scriptural, Satanic attack on the Creatorship of God and is surely preparing the way for the great atheistic rebellion of the last days. The appeal to bow before God as Creator is enforced by a solemn declaration of the near approach of judgment. Then follows (v. 8) another angel proclaiming the fall of Babylon, the great religious confederacy of the last days. Rome and her daughters, all united in the exaltation of Man and in the rejection of their own fall and guilt before God—and of His grace through the blood of Christ, shed for the remission of sins.

We shall hope to deal more fully with this important subject in its place, when we come to chapters xvii. and xviii. The reason of her fall is indicated, "because she made all the nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Yet a third angel (v. 9) proclaims his message this time "in a loud voice"—a solemn warning against worshipping the beast and his image and taking his mark in the forehead or hand. The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God "without mixture," that is, judgment unalloyed, in contrast with the "cup full

of mixture " of Psalm lxxv. 8 (" temporal judgments *mixed* with mercy "), a cup that can never be exhausted, a torment without cessation or end, and no rest afforded day or night. How utterly vain are the denials of future punishment and its unremitting character in view of such statements as these (xiv. 12). " Here is (*i.e.*, comes in) the patience of the saints "—who in contrast with the worshippers of the beast—" keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." Rather than meet such an awful judgment as above, it were better to suffer the extreme penalty, as the voice from heaven declares. " Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth." This is true in all time, but specially of those who choose death rather than incur Divine vengeance in this last hour, as the words " from henceforth " shew. Such find rest from their labours, and also reward, " for their works do follow them " (v. 13).

THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE

We now reach another direct stage in this Pentecostal chapter: " And I looked, and behold, a white cloud and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man having on his head a golden crown and in his hand a sharp sickle." The first-fruits having been gathered in, it remains to garner the harvest of the earth. Who can the Reaper be, but He Who " maketh the clouds His chariots "—even the Lord of the Harvest, who has " sent forth labourers into His harvest," and now reaps Himself the full harvest? No doubt the angels will be the reapers, too, the immediate agents of the ingathering, doubtless, too, " the sowers in tears will come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them," but the Lord Himself will be the ultimate Reaper, His will be the

victory in the case of each redeemed one thus "gathered into His garner," and for that He is crowned with a victor's golden crown. It is true that "Son of Man" here is anarthrous, but this is also the case in chapter i. 13, where undoubtedly the Lord is in view. In Acts ii. the first-fruits were the 120 disciples of the Lord at Jerusalem, who all received the Holy Ghost, with special powers, sign-gifts, etc., for testimony. The harvest may be said to have begun with the 3000 on the same day, then the 5000 males of chapter iv. (see Matt. xiv. 21), and so on, till James could speak of many "myriads" who believed (chapter xxi. 20), surely a bountiful harvest, spreading too into other lands, Asia Minor, Greece, Africa, Italy. But what will this be compared to the last great harvest we are considering, when the first-fruits will be not 120, but 144,000—twelve hundred times as great—Spirit-filled witnesses? That will be the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh, the full accomplishment of Joel's prophecy, of which Pentecost was a foretaste. When this final ingathering takes place, not a tare will be included, not a stalk of corn left standing, not a single ear lost, but every grain of true wheat safely garnered in—"a great multitude that no man can number." The next scene would correspond with the solemn words, "but the chaff will He burn up with unquenchable fire" (Matt. iii. 12); or with the binding in bundles and casting into the fire of the tares (chap. xiii. 30, 41), and it is significant that the angel, who now communicates God's will to the angel with the second sharp sickle, is said to "have power over fire." Certain it is that it is judgment which is introduced here—the vintage of the earth "for her grapes are fully ripe." Our thoughts naturally go back to another vine presented to us in the Old Testament, a vine chosen out of the nations and

brought out of Egypt into the land of promise. It was the choicest vine, planted in the best of vineyards, protected from every hostile influence and surrounded with every material and spiritual advantage. This vine represents the whole house of Israel—man at his best, privileged and safeguarded beyond his fellows. But when Jehovah looked for grapes, all He got was wild grapes ; instead of judgment and righteousness, only oppression and a cry (see Isaiah v. which describes Israel's failure and Psalm lxxx. Israel's judgment). And what is the lesson to be learned ? They that are in the flesh (be they ever so privileged, be they ever so religious) cannot please God. But what about man as we see him described in the closing verses of this chapter as " the vine of the earth " ?—this is man left to himself, under the tutelage of Satan and of the Man of Sin, the apostate nations of Christendom and the earth ? This is man at his worst. What can be hoped from him ? Can one drop of heavenly wine be distilled from the whole " vine of the earth ? " " Their vine is of the vine of Sodom and of the field of Gomorrah, their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter ; their wine is the poison of dragons, the cruel venom of asps. . . . To Me (Jehovah) belongeth vengeance and recompense, their foot shall slide in due time, for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." Now mercy can no longer linger, the glittering sword is unsheathed and falls on the head of the ungodly : " I will render vengeance to Mine enemies and will reward them that hate Me " (Deut. xxxii. 32, 33, 35-41). It is a relief to turn away from man at his worst or at his best, to God's Vine, the true Vine, from Whom alone true fruit can be found for God, and from Whom each of the redeemed must learn the lesson, " From Me is thy

fruit found." But now the crisis of judgment is reached ; " And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and cast it into the winepress of the wrath of God, and the winepress was trodden without the city." This is clearly not the winepress of Isa. lx., which will be in Bozrah, whereas this is " without the city " (*i.e.*, Jerusalem). The term is merely indicative of judgment. Here we read " blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs." That is two hundred miles, about the extreme length of Palestine. This would have seemed an impossible length for any battle front in past days, but the last war has taught its lessons of the possibilities of things, and no doubt such are only in their beginnings. How the closing detail of this chapter is to take place, it is not needful for us to know ; that it will take place, as it is said, I see no room to doubt.

CHAPTER XV

" THE PREPARATION OF THE SEVEN VIALS "

THE previous chapter, concluding the third parenthesis of the book, has taken us forward to the end ; the present chapter takes us back to the period preceding it, to the outpouring of the last judgments. Now at last we come to the vials* of God's wrath, the full expression of the seventh trumpet (see chap. xi. 15), and that during the latter part of the last " week," for the power of the beast is established, as chapter xvi. 10 shews : " the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast and his kingdom was full of darkness." " And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues ; for in them is filled up the wrath of God " (v. 1). These represent a new phase of the great tribulation. Hitherto it has been man oppressing his fellow-man, now it is God pouring out His judgments on man, no doubt principally the ungodly, but the godly remnant will not be immune. It will add to their trouble and perplexity to find themselves, not only the objects of the bitterest persecution the world has ever seen, but also exposed to the terrible consequences of Divine judgments present in the earth. They must bear their share with the apostate nation under law in their rejection of their Messiah, Whom they would fain receive for themselves, but will only recognize as Jesus the

* The word is really " bowl," a vessel of which the contents can be emptied suddenly and completely, thus indicating the catastrophic characters of these judgments.

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crucified, when they look on Him Whom they pierced, at His final manifestation in glory. Many of the Psalms* bear witness to their bitter experiences.

The apostle speaks of these angels of judgment as "*another* sign, great and marvellous," the reference being, it would seem, to the two signs in chapter xii. 1—"a great sign in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun."—She is there identified as the one whose trouble is at hand; and in verse 5, the sign of the dragon—the one who is to inflict that trouble, the power of Satan in the last days.

A sign (*semeion*) is not necessarily miraculous, for instance, the sign given to the shepherds in Luke ii. 12 to identify the babe born to them that day in the City of David, a Saviour, Christ the Lord. It is the word used by Paul in 2 Thess. iii. 17, when he says that "his salutation is his *token* in every epistle," as we say a man signs himself, that is, by his signature he identifies a letter or document with himself.

But often a sign is miraculous, as that promised to Ahaz in Isaiah vii. 14, greater than ought that could be found "in the depth, or in the height above" the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God, by virgin birth. Here, too, in our chapter the sign is miraculous for it is described as "great and marvellous."

But before the angels are actually commissioned to their solemn ministry, God exhibits the trophies of His grace; "And I saw as it were a sea of glass *i.e.*, transparent as glass) mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God" (v. 2).

In chapter iv. 6, we have seen this glassy sea

* Very grievous error has been fallen into by speculative minds attempting to associate the Lord Jesus, not only in sympathy with His suffering people, but in the experience with them of divine judgment, apart from sin-bearing. This is serious heresy.

unoccupied, now we see it "mingled with fire," and filled with those who have won the victory over all the power of the enemy; and that by grace alone. Out of weakness they had been made strong; and had sealed their testimony with their blood, "not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection."

They hold the harps of God to celebrate His praise, and that in a fourfold way, "they sing the song of Moses the servant of God" to emphasize their character as saved Israelites. The analogy between the deliverance of Israel from the power of Pharaoh, and in these last days from the power of the Beast is very striking; also "the song of the Lamb," indicating that their victory greatly transcends that over mere earthly enemies, but includes redemption from sin and Satan by the blood of the Lamb. They also bear witness to His greatness as Creator, so much challenged in our day, "Great and marvellous are Thy *works*, Lord God Almighty," also to the rightness of His ways as King of Nations,* "Who shall not fear Thee and glorify Thy Name?"

It will be seen that what begins with a song of praise to God, develops into a solemn acknowledgment of His majesty, and into a prophetic announcement that all nations will soon recognize His claims.

After this the Seer "beheld the Heavenly Temple open and the seven angels issuing forth, having the seven plagues." They are "clothed in pure and white linen," symbolic of spotless righteousness, and "girded with golden girdles," indicative of preparedness for divine service.

It is one of the four living creatures, representing, it is believed, for reasons already pointed out, the

* The MS. authority for saints is practically nil; between "nations" and "ages" the authorities are almost equally divided, with a slight preponderance to the former. As this seems to fit the context well, it is adopted here.

church as guardian of the throne of God, Who associates her, by thus presenting the bowls of wrath to the executors of judgment, with the vindication of His Holy claims, who liveth for ever and ever.

The "filling of the temple with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power," denotes as before in His dealings with Israel (*e.g.* Exod. xl. 34, 35; 1 Kings viii. 10, 11), His acquiescence in the vindications of His holiness, so now in the accomplishment of His judgments, and with a similar result, that "no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEVEN VIALS

HERE we reach the high-water mark of the Apocalyptic judgments, for "the Vials are the seven *last* plagues" (chap. xv. 1), so that, making allowance for the parenthesis of chapters xvii.-xix., 10, we are brought within sight of the great climax of all history, the Revelation in glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Thess. i. 7). To this point all the events of the book have been moving inexorably, though with lingering steps, for God Who is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance," would choose rather that His long-suffering were mistaken for slackness, than that one should perish who might be brought to repentance (2 Pet. iii. 9). "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," and as the crisis approaches, the testimony becomes more insistent and intense.

Our chapter opens with the commission to the seven angels who bear the vials, "Go your ways and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." We have read in chapter v. 8 of the "golden vials full of odours," emptied before the Lamb which are "the prayers of the saints," here the vials are full of wrath and are poured out on an apostate world.

It is hard to understand how anyone can see in this a picture of God's dealings in grace with the world to-day. No doubt God does deal with nations in government, but grace to the rebellious and the gospel for every creature characterize His present

dealings—judgment, those of Apocalyptic times. In this chapter there is not a word of grace or gospel or forgiveness. Yet some would have us believe that in the present year of grace we have reached a definite point in this chapter, that we are actually in such and such a vial. This chapter breathes a very different spirit from the gospel of the grace of God.

This being said we must remember the distinction between the Divine "wrath" here displayed from that spoken of in chapter xiv. 10—"The wine of the wrath of God poured out *without mixture* into the cup of His indignation," the final and endless portion of those who refuse to repent. The judgments of the vials are temporal in character and intended to lead to repentance, and correspond as we have seen with the cup of Psalms lxxv. 8 which is "full of mixture." Now it is the gospel to every creature; then it will be judgment to every creature to lead them if possible to repentance.

We cannot but notice a correspondence in order and character between these vials and the trumpet judgments of chapters viii. and ix., but while the effect of the latter was on the whole slow and limited in scope, affecting a *third part* of earth and sea, that of the vials is swift and world-wide.

How then are these vial judgments to be interpreted? Some find in them some historical fulfilment in the Christian era, but this whole system is arbitrary in the extreme, and, as I believe, entirely mistaken. Is it not more likely that the Scripture is its own interpreter, rather than that variable and uncertain quantity—history? Others, while believing that these events are still future, lay great stress on the symbolic character of the book. Imagination plays a great role in their system. I suggest a far safer canon of interpretation is to interpret literally wherever possible. We need not assume that God's

miraculous interventions in the past have exhausted His resources in physical judgments. The Noachian Deluge was literal, so the destruction of the cities of the plain, and the plagues of Egypt, too, and it would be difficult to prove that the terrible events here foretold are not literal; for as we have seen, there is a marked parallel between the Egyptian and Apocalyptic plagues. Let us now consider the vials. "The first angel went and poured out his vial upon the earth," and its effect is a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image." This is reminiscent of the sixth Egyptian plague, the blains on man and beast, and on the magicians also. Here God sets His mark—a loathsome sore, upon Satan's marked ones. The symbolizers tell us this is a "moral sore," whatever that may exactly mean. But why not take it literally? The list of ills that flesh is heir to may yet be far from complete. I remember some years ago in Central Africa, arriving at a Mission Station, close to the source of the Zambezi, where the medical man in charge told me they had just passed through an epidemic of a disease he had never met with, nor heard described, beginning with a blood-red spot and developing into a rodent ulcer, so noisome, as to be scarcely approachable.

The second and third vials correspond with the same trumpets, and affect the sea and the rivers; which become like the blood of a dead man, corresponding to the first plague. This will hit the human race severely in its interests and occupations. Then the rivers and fountains become tainted. This is explained by some as pointing to "moral death," and the contamination of all sources of spiritual refreshment. But surely these will have been affected long before this. Again we are told that the words

"every living soul died in the sea" only means that "each professor makes shipwreck." But are false professors "living souls," and long ere this all such will have become frankly apostate. How the terrible phenomena will take place we can form no idea. But the angel of the waters seems to take a literal view of things in saying, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art and wast, because Thou hast judged us. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy." He sees the poetic justice of the sentence. They (the men afflicted by the plagues) have shed blood like water, let them drink water like blood! The Angel of the Altar adds his testimony from heaven to that of the angel of the waters, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments."

The fourth vial corresponds to the fourth trumpet of chapter viii., but while there the sun's light is decreased, here its heat is increased with augmented intensity of judgment. This is interpreted symbolically, as "an increased energy in the governing body on the earth to inflict anguish on men." But such an interpretation ignores what many believe to be a characteristic of the vials, that they represent *God's* judgment on men, including their governments. It is literally, be it noted, "*the men, i.e., those which had the mark of the beast*" (see verse 1). We are safer in taking the vials to be in most cases physical judgments. Science does not know very much. Many theories have held the field as to the source and maintenance of the sun's heat, the fall of extraneous bodies, contraction, electric and radioactive force, but all in turn have been recognized as insufficient to compensate for the incredible consumption of energy in the continuous radiation of the sun. Dissolution of atoms under the high tem-

perature of between four and five million degrees at the centre of the sun, producing inexhaustible supplies of energy, is the latest theory. Whatever the unknown cause of the increase of heat mentioned here, the effect is not, as intended, the repentance of men, but "they (the marked men) blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over the plagues; and they repented not to give Him glory." The fifth vial, like the fifth trumpet, results in darkness; here "the seat of the beast and his kingdom were full of darkness, and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores and repented not of their deeds." They are as immune now to the effect proposed by His judgments, as they had been insensible to His "goodness leading them to repentance." What an answer all this is to those who affirm that the terrors of hell will produce in the lost loving submission to God! Scripture and experience belie this.

We now at length come to the much disputed sixth vial. "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates. The water thereof was dried up, that the way of the Kings of the East might be prepared" (v. 12).

Many confidently interpret this "drying up" as the gradual wearing away of the Turkish Empire, so as to allow the return of the people of Israel from Assyria, etc., but why should these be called the "Kings of the East"? Unfortunately, too, for this interpretation, the Turkish Empire, in spite of the ground lost in Europe, has taken a new lease of life in the regions drained by the Euphrates. Is it not safer to interpret the Euphrates literally and the Kings of the East—the Asiatic powers? This harmonizes with Old Testament prophecy, *e.g.*, Isaiah xi.: "The Lord . . . with His mighty wind

shall shake His hand over the river, and shall smite it *into* (not in, see R.V.) its seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod, and there shall be a highway for the remnant of His people, which shall remain from Assyria, like as there was to Israel in the day that he came up out of Egypt (vv. 15 and 16). No less literal will be the partial drying up of the Euphrates, than was the passage made through the Red Sea for Israel. "Men" here may refer to "the Kings of the East" of our chapter. As for the expression "into seven streams," I remember one summer in South Italy, seeing a considerable river dried up in this way, and I could count, from the high village where I was staying, exactly seven streams occupying its broad bed, easily negotiable, as I judged, by an active man. The Euphrates was not only the Eastern limit of the Roman Empire, but also of the land promised to the seed of Abraham. It is the great natural barrier between the West and the East, from which the great powers of Asia must come to play their part in the final conflict. The effect of this vial will be spiritual, as well as physical: "I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the dragon . . . for they are the spirits of demons working miracles." Certainly frogs "moving in the waters without fins and scales" (see Lev. xi. 10) are an apt figure of unclean spirits. Each of these is associated with a member of the triad of evil. This marks a fresh development in the Satanic kingdom of that which we see working all around us to-day. As the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures is rejected, so does that of defiling spirits rush in to fill the vacuum. The awful increase of the Satanic cult of Spiritism speaks to us of closing days. It were folly to treat as mere fraud the Spiritist seances which have become, we might say, a commonplace in the world's economy; though

fraud is mixed up with them, such fraud only proves that the demons are the masters, not the servants, of the mediums. Nothing is more clearly recognized in Scripture than the possibility of communicating with evil spirits; nothing is more scathingly condemned (see Lev. xix. 31; xx. 27; Deut. xviii. 11). The unclean spirits here are seducing spirits. Like Jannes and Jambres, they oppose by imitating the power of God, for they too work miracles by Satanic energy. Nor is this a new device of Satan. As the god of this world his great work has ever been on the religious plane, now by the great systems of Christendom he is temporarily deceiving even some Christians. He appears as an angel of light and counterfeits of the work of God. We are surrounded to-day by manifestations of spiritual power, which must, *ipso facto*, it is popularly supposed, even in ill-instructed Christian circles, emanate from the Holy Spirit. We hear of sick folk falling senseless on the ground, when spoken to or touched by popular faith-healers. Do such proceedings harmonize with apostolic healings? Do they bear the hall-mark of the Holy Spirit? The answer can only be in the negative.

These demoniacal miracles of Revelation xvi. will have as their object to deceive the kings of the earth and gather them to Armageddon, the Mount of Megiddo, and they will prove successful. This will be the base of the far-flung battle-line in the last great contest; the valley of Jehoshaphat will be its advance post, the concentration point against God and His people. The seventh vial is the climax of all, and the great voice proclaims "It is done," or literally "it has taken place." The result is a great earthquake growing in intensity, before which the great city, Jerusalem,* and the cities of the nations fall in

* Chapter xi. 8, where the same description, "the city, the great one" occurs, referring to Jerusalem.

ruins. Babylon, too, comes to remembrance, and every island (solemn thought, as has been said, for the "United Kingdom") fled away, etc. God brings forth "the treasures of the hail, reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war" (Job xxxviii. 21). It will be an unprecedented hail-storm, but with no other results than that of previous judgments, "Men blasphemed God because of the hail, for the plague thereof was exceeding great."

CHAPTER XVII

“ THE JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT WHORE ”

IN this section is contained the third parenthesis of the book, reaching to chapter xix. 10. Its subject is the apotheosis and judgment of great Babylon. In verse 19 of the previous chapter we read “ Great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the vine of the fierceness of His wrath.” What is implied in this solemn sentence—the identity of this Babylon, her character, glory, and judgment are here revealed. Our first impression is one of surprise. How can Babylon, the ancient enemy of God’s people, the rival of Jerusalem, the centre of the world’s idolatry, the seat of Satan, come into judgment here, for long centuries have passed since her capture by Cyrus in 538 B.C., leading on to her gradual decline. Long had she passed from actual history, when John was writing. Her magnificent palaces, her gigantic walls, a hundred yards high, her immense brazen gates, her hanging gardens, the wonder of the ancient world, built by Semiramis, her immense temple of Belus, 660 feet high, in seven successive towers, higher than the great Pyramid, and surmounted by a statue of the god, no doubt ultimately, no other than the devil himself, all had long since been razed to the ground. At the time, Isaiah uttered by the Spirit the prophecies of her destruction, “ Babylon the glory of the Kingdom . . . shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah ”*

* Not necessarily in its instantaneous character, but in its completeness, so that I do not think there is any necessity that Babylon should be rebuilt, for another city has, as we see in this chapter, taken her place.

(chap. xiii. 19), nothing seemed more wildly improbable than their literal accomplishment. But the prophet's words "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken into the ground" (chap. xxi. 9), was literally fulfilled less than two centuries later, and when John wrote the Apocalypse the great city was a historic memory, nothing more. But here we read again, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen" (Rev. xviii. 2), describing a prophetic occurrence, future to the Apostle.

How can that fall, which has already fallen? Only by being rebuilt, or by having come into existence under a new guise. Certainly, Babylon has not been literally rebuilt. It was indeed a crushing personal reverse for Satan when she fell. "Bel was confounded." Satan was deprived of his seat. But with characteristic energy and effrontery he devised a new attack. This is the Mystery of the Great Whore.

If one who had seen the primitive church in her first love, betrothed as a chaste virgin to Christ, in the place of testimony for her absent Lord, "continuing steadfast in the apostle's doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers," had fallen asleep, not for the twenty years of the legend, but for the nigh two thousand years of the Christian era, what would be his horror, on awaking, to find in the place of public testimony for Christ, no longer a chaste virgin, but an abandoned woman. Here is the Mystery of religious iniquity. The Mysteries of God* are unexpected developments of His hidden purposes of grace in view of man's failure, those of Satan, unexpected developments of evil, as those failures are consummated.

* For a further development of this subject, see *The Mysteries of the New Testament*, by the present writer (Messrs. John Ritchie, Ltd., Kilmarnock).

The time has now come for the Lord's servant to be initiated into this dark mystery of Satanic working. One of the angels of the vials is commissioned to communicate it for he was specially in the mind of God. "Come hither," he said, "I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication" (vv. 1 and 2). There is an esoteric and an exoteric cult in this utterly evil system. The people are hypnotized and fall an unconscious prey to her wiles; the kings of the earth know the evil in its depths, but are not deferred from her embraces.

Once more the apostle is carried away in the spirit, this time, though, from the point of view of man, into the centre of modern civilization and worldly and ecclesiastical splendour, from the divine standpoint, into a wilderness, as the world is for every child of God in communion with Him.

Here he sees "a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns." She is arrayed in scarlet and purple and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication. "And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

What means this horrible portent? It is the union of Church and State of the last days, and in it are realized the accomplishment of two purposes, one of which has ever been the goal of ecclesiastical policy, the subjugation of the temporal power, and the other, which has bulked largely in men's minds of late years, the reunion of Christendom. The former was once practically realized, but lost, the second only a few

years ago would have been considered altogether Utopian, and outside the sphere of practical politics. Both will be realized, as we see in the picture before us. The woman is one—the professed representative of God and His Christ, and she is sitting upon the scarlet beast, having seven heads and ten horns, the revived and united Roman Empire of chapter xiv. Little it matters to her that the beast is a very monster of iniquity, full of the names of blasphemy, against the very God she professes to serve. Her opportunism knows no bounds. It is Christendom without a single Christian in it. She must have power at any cost and the beast consents to carry her as long as may be for his own advantage. This is religious corruption in full development, but there is one trait in her which has been true of her in all her stages. She is still the same persecuting power as ever—she is true to type. “I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, and when I saw her I wondered with great admiration.”

THE INTERPRETATION OF MYSTERY BABYLON ON THE BEAST

The woman instead of being “filled with the Spirit” as is enjoined to the Church, is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus; and at the sight of her thus seated on the beast the apostle marvelled with great marvel.* There would seem a tinge of surprise in the angel’s question, “Wherefore didst thou marvel?” For was there anything incompatible in this union of Church and State? Must it not endure to the end, in order that Satan’s kingdom may stand? Indeed, it is only when the beast

* The two words are the same as in verse 7. Admiration in our sense is not the word.

devours the whore and thus "Satan casts out Satan," that his kingdom, according to our Lord's foretelling, verges to its fall.

However, the angel undertakes to unfold the dual mystery of the drunken woman and the scarlet beast, with its seven heads and ten horns. Clearly in the vision this latter is represented by some four-footed monster, standing, as we have seen in chapter xiii. 2, for the fourth great world-empire, to which God had entrusted the kingdom, until the "time and seasons" come for its restoration to Israel (see Dan. vii. 7, 23). But the empire, as we have already seen, is personified in a man, its last great Imperial head, so completely is all its power and authority vested in him, and it is in this sinister personality, that the angel specially views the beast. True, the empire existed in a certain form, was broken up, and will appear again, of which there are ominous signs in our day. But it could not be said, as an empire, "to ascend out of the bottomless pit," whereas this mysterious fact will literally attach to the last head. Indeed, it is in this character that he is first mentioned in chapter xi. 7, when he succeeds in doing what no other power on earth could do, overcome and slay God's two witnesses. We have seen that at the moment of his miraculous recovery from his mortal wound he will become indwelt by the spirit of one of his Imperial predecessors, who, instead of being shut up in Hades, the usual abode of disembodied spirits, will have been confined in a distinct place—the bottomless pit or the abyss, where Satan will be imprisoned in the Millennium (Rev. xx. 1-3). Thence in due time he will be liberated and "reincarnated" in the Man of Sin, as his possessing spirit. This terrible personage will become the centre of the world's wonder, that is, of all who are not written in the book of life from the

foundation of the world. None but the elect could escape being deceived.

As for the meaning of the beast's seven heads, it is these that the mind that hath wisdom will understand (v. 9). They have a dual interpretation, first as seven mountains on which the woman sitteth, and then as seven kings of the Empire represented by the beast. In the first interpretation, we see one more illustration of Satan's favourite device, the imitation of God's work. Has Christ a bride and a city? Satan has a harlot and a city. Clearly, then, the woman is first associated with a city built on seven hills. This could not be literal Babylon, even were she rebuilt, for there are no hills in the plain of Shinar, nor is there any need for her to be rebuilt, for another city has taken her place, the seven-hilled city of Rome. That city represents at once the centre of a world-wide corrupt religious system, and the capital of a great world power, as Italy has once more become in the last decade, or group of world-powers, re-unified as the revived Roman Empire, or League of Nations, or whatever name may be chosen to designate it. This brings us back to the second interpretation of the seven heads, they are rulers of *Imperial* Rome, either in its past history, or last development. Five of these emperors had fallen, one, Domitian, was reigning when John wrote, a seventh was to come and continue for a short space—Napoleon the great, as many believe; the great Emperor of the last days of whom we have been speaking is the eighth, though strictly speaking he is not an eighth head, "for he is of the seven" (v. 11). That is, he becomes as we have seen, one of the heads reincarnated. Without wishing in any way to dogmatize, it is remarkable that there was a widespread opinion in the early church that the Emperor Nero was destined to reappear, and play a

great future role in the history of the world. However this may be, we know this "wicked one will be revealed in his season." He is "the son of perdition," for that is his end. He will, in fact, be the first Gentile to be cast into the lake of fire, along with the Antichrist, the first Jew (see Rev. xix. 20).

The ten horns are ten kings, destined to arise in the latest phase of the empire. They will apparently first take on the character of dictators, along with puppet kings, as we see in some countries to-day. They will become actual kings, as depicted in chapter xiii. 1, "one hour with the beast" (v. 12, see also 1 John ii. "the last hour"). The Man of Sin will be the President-Emperor of the great confederacy. Two aims will animate them, in one of which, the destruction of the Great Whore, they will succeed, in the other, war with the Lamb, miserably fail. As for the Whore, in spite of her world-wide influence denoted by the many waters, on which she sits—"the peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues," her time will come. "The ten horns . . . upon the beast"—hitherto the source of her authority—"these shall hate the Whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh and burn her with fire." What has been passing in Russia during the last decade, will then take place in every country of Christendom against every form of organized religion—Roman, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Protestant, etc., anything, in fact, bearing the name of Christ. "For God hath put it in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree and give their kingdoms unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." God will thus "make the wrath of man to praise Him" in executing His vengeance on this horrible religious system—"Mystery Babylon." But "the remainder of their wrath will He restrain"; "these shall make war with the Lamb and the Lamb shall

overcome them : for He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and they that are with Him are called and chosen and faithful." As though to leave no possible doubt as to the identity of the woman, the angel adds, " The woman which thou sawest is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth." What other city but Rome could fill this description, when John wrote ?

CHAPTER XVIII

GOD'S VENGEANCE ON BABYLON

THIS is a chapter of Divine vengeance and occupies a needful place, in order that God's mind toward the great pseudo-Christian systems, fittingly united at the last as Mystery Babylon, be fully declared. God has so long kept silence toward those, who have professed to "declare His statutes and take His covenant in their mouth," while in works denying Him, that men might think He was altogether such a one as themselves, but the day of vengeance draws near and God will speak His mind fully and freely on all that bears the Name of Christ, while systematically denying the efficacy of His atoning work, and the sufficiency and authority of His inspired Word. The blood of the martyrs has no doubt been "the seed of the Church," but it was no less "precious in His sight," and calling for vengeance. It is fitting that His Holy character be publicly vindicated.

But the striking contrast between the brief notice of Babylon's downfall in chapter xvii., and the wealth of detail and commentary in this chapter, have led some to suppose that the destruction of Babylon by the hand of the ten kings there is something previous and quite distinct from the judgments described here. This is, I believe, quite a mistake. They are the same judgments described from the human and Divine standpoints. God uses the ten kings to carry out, quite unwittingly, His will. No doubt they, and Satan behind them, would boast of their victory, for they know not God, but "hate the

whore and make her desolate and naked and shall eat her flesh and burn her with fire," but " God hath put it in their hearts to fulfil His will."

To interpret then His dealings with Babylon, God sends another heavenly messenger having great authority and such glory that the earth was lightened by it. It is remarkable that He uses here, and again in verse 7, words of the Spirit from Isaiah xxi. 9, and xlvii. 8, primarily uttered by the prophet with reference to literal Babylon, thus demonstrating what has already been advanced, the close connection and continuity of spirit between the city and the system. A wickeder Satan, if we may so say, now casts out Satan, and what has before borne the name of Christ becomes openly and professedly the very habitation of the evil one and his hosts. This is what is going on in Russia to-day before our eyes. The religious buildings and fabrics of the orthodox church are become the habitation of demons, and the hold of every foul spirit, etc.—being perverted from even the professed service of God, into theatres, cinemas, and what not, where vice and wantonness flaunt themselves. This will take place on a larger scale over the whole of Christendom. It will only be for a little space, for these evil powers will be imprisoned shortly with Satan in the abyss (Rev. xx. 2 ; and Isa. xxiv. 21, 22, verse 3 justifies God in these His dealings). She, the professing church, has played the harlot with the world, let her be repudiated publicly and for ever by Him, to whose name she pretends. Clearly, verse 4 is parenthetical, as a warning and call to all whom it may concern—especially the faithful remnant of Israel, God's witnesses then upon the earth, to have no dealings with this dissolute whore. But are such words any less appropriate to God's true people to-day ? Are they to be free to stay in religious

systems, in which the atonement is denied, and the Word of God flouted and its principles ignored or trampled underfoot? Many true saints who, like Lot, vex their righteous souls from day to day with the ungodly deeds and doctrines of Christendom, seem to think in their simplicity that they have a mission to sustain and improve what is not of God, but His call to such is "*Come out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you and will be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*" (2 Cor. vi. 7, 17-18). Not only so, but here these saints are called to associate themselves with the Divine judgment, which is in itself a sufficient proof that they are not saints of the present church and dispensation, but Israelites, to whom such a ministry is not foreign.

The wording of the call is remarkable: "Reward her *even as she rewardeth you, and double unto her double* (lit. as in R.V., the double), *according to her works*: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double" (lit. "the," verse 1).

Does this expression "the double" mean twice as much or only the equivalent? The words "even as" and "according to her works" seem to indicate the latter. The Greek word means double-folded which is the sense of the Hebrew "Kahphal," the root employed in Isaiah xl. 2, "for she hath received of the Lord's hand *double* for all her sins, namely, the governmental chastening corresponding to her sins." There is a poetic justice in this, which would not be quite so evident, if the word had to be taken in the sense of twice as much, as in Gen. xli. 32, "for that the dream was doubled." Exod. xxii. 4, "he shall restore double," verse 7, "let him pay double." Also 2 Sam. xx. 10, and 1 Kings xviii. 34, where the root is "Shahnah." The other root, as here, is used

in Exod. xxvi. 9, "Thou shalt double the sixth curtain." Exod. xxviii. 16, "Four-square, the breastplate shall be doubled," that is, the back will correspond to the front. So Babylon's death, mourning, and famine will be in proportion to her self-glorying and self-indulgence. The effect on all the vested interests touched by her fall are now detailed. The kings of the earth (of course outside the ten who have afflicted her) will mourn the end of their sinful pleasures (vv. 9, 10); the merchants of the earth will lament the loss of their gains in every department of traffic, beginning with gold, the most sought after and valued, and ending with the merchandise most neglected and depreciated, the souls of men! And the seafaring who have gained their living by supplying her needs from afar, will weep for her desolation. But though earth mourns her losses, heaven will rejoice. "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her." The same who have proclaimed the grace of God, will now acclaim His righteous judgments. Verse 21 is a prophetic vision—the destruction of Babylon will be overwhelming and final. She shall be found no more at all—her history ends in desolation and silence, and justly so for "by her sorceries were all nations deceived, and in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

THE opening verses of our chapter read like a response to the appeal of the previous one: "Rejoice over Babylon, thou heaven" (v. 20). There, at any rate, God is unanimously vindicated in all His ways. The redeemed in glory had learnt on earth to justify God—"Wisdom is justified of all her children." They had condemned themselves, and God had justified them. His long-suffering grace had been misinterpreted by the world as "slackness," and the idea of a coming judgment or an endless hell had been derided; now the various heavenly companies rejoice at the public vindication of the holy character of their God. The apostle hears a great voice of much people saying, "Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore." Two reasons are given for this, her corruption of the earth, and her murderous treatment of His servants. The rejoicers close as they began, with Alleluia. Such language a sentimental ecclesiasticism that expurgates the Psalter of certain severe psalms belonging to a future dispensation, would criticize as very "unchristian." But they have yet to learn that God's government of the universe is not, and never will be, on *Christian* principles, any more than human government is intended to be to-day, but on principles of strict righteousness. The next word seems parenthetical, and explains the terrible and final character of these

judgments: "Her smoke rose up (lit. riseth up) for ever and ever." This could not be the smoke of a literal city, still less of a system, but represents the eternal judgment of those whose life-work it had been to uphold Babylon and her corrupt principles. The same fearful sentence is uttered of these religious sinners as of those more openly heinous rebels, the worshippers of the beast. "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up (the same word as above) for ever and ever" (chapter xiv. 10). In both these cases the strongest possible expression in the Greek for eternity is used.* How vain and wicked then the efforts of those who deny the full force of never-endingness to such expressions of God's word! Next appear once more on the scene the four-and-twenty elders and the four living beings of chapter iv. There they worshipped God as Creator, here as the Avenger of His people. They utter their "Amen," to what others have said, and add their own "Alleluia." Then a voice comes out of the throne, confirmatory of all that has gone before, providing that these various heavenly companies are in the mind of God. "Praise our God, all ye His servants and ye that fear Him, both small and great." This brings out universal praise, "as the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," and introduces

* "Eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn." To translate literally this idiomatic phrase, as R.V. does in the margin, "to the ages of the ages," seems only calculated to raise a dust of uncertainty around an expression, which, by its usage, is perfectly clear, *e.g.*: Gal. i. 5; Phil. iv. 20; 1 Tim. i. 17; 2 Tim. iv. 18; Heb. xiii. 21; 1 Pet. iv. 11; 2 Pet. iii. 11, 18; all ascriptions of glory to God to last for ever and ever; and such passages as Rev. i. 18; iv. 9; v. 14; x. 6; xv. 7—where God's existence is in question. Can anyone affirm that the phrase means less than our word eternity or "for ever and for ever," phrases which, though both connected philologically with an "age," are our usual way of describing endless duration?

a new subject for thanksgiving ; the marriage of the Lamb, for His wife hath made herself ready. As to who this "wife"* is, there is some divergence of judgment.† Some say Israel, some the church, others only a favoured part of the church. Some folk seem to wish to perpetuate the unhappy divisions of the church into the Eternal State. They imagine preferential circles, maintaining that all the redeemed of this dispensation form the Body, but only the specially faithful ones the Bride. But surely the Body is nearer the Lord than the Bride and thus, if anything, more privileged. I think the distinctions within the church must be put into the Scripture, if they are to be got out. The Lord says, "I go to prepare a *place* for you," and later we read, "so shall *we* ever be with the Lord." No doubt there will be different rewards, and crowns and places in the Kingdom, but all the church will form His Body and all the church will form His Bride. As for those who claim for Israel that she is the Bride, she is certainly spoken of in the Old Testament as the married wife of Jehovah, which suggests an analogy with the relationship of Bride.‡ Thus "Thy Maker is thy Husband"; "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you"; "Although I was a husband to them, saith the Lord"; "I will go and return to my first husband" (Isa. liv. 5; Jer. iii. 14; xxxi. 32; Hosea ii. 7). Must not then Israel, it is alleged, be the Bride, otherwise there would be two Brides, but this would be so in any case, for clearly what is described here is something

* "Gunee," here translated wife, while it often means a married wife or simply a woman, has also the meaning of a betrothed bride, e.g. the notable case of the Virgin Mary, the betrothed of Joseph, but twice spoken of as his wife (Matt. i. 20, 24).

† Of course, only a spiritual relation of high privilege, symbolized by the earthly relationship.

‡ I have no doubt that Israel will be restored to her place of privilege, but I cannot see any thought of a re-marriage.

new ; not the restoration of an unfaithful wife, but the marriage of a pure virgin, who " has made herself ready " ; not coming repentant with soiled garments, but clothed with fine linen, the righteousnesses of the saints—the works of faith, labours of love, " fruits of the Spirit," recognized as appertaining to each. Such a manifestation would follow suitably on the judgment of the Bema of Christ. This scene is manifestly in heaven, whither the Church will have already long been caught away, but how then could Israel be intended who will still be passing through her time of " trouble " on the earth ? This marriage will be enacted previous to the coming of Christ in glory, the deliverance and blessing of Israel subsequently. It is true that the Bride is referred to in the gospels, but only in such an indefinite way, as would point to her not being of Israel, though an object of interest to her, because of her earthly relation to Christ. Thus John the Baptist speaks of himself, only as the friend of the Bridegroom, who has the Bride. Surely if Israel was the Bride, John would be part of her. But he was a prophet and in many ways anticipated his dispensation. Thus his favourite theme was that baptism in the Spirit, which depended on the glorification of Christ, and which he may have foreseen was necessary for the formation of the Bride. Again the Lord speaks of His disciples not as the Bride, but as the children of the bride-chamber (Matt. ix. 15). He says nothing of leaving the Bride, and in Luke xii. 36, He bases His exhortation to His disciples of Israel on what will happen *when He will return from the wedding*, which tallies exactly with our chapter—the marriage of the Lamb—first verses 7-9, and then verse 11, the return of the Son of Man in glory. This again agrees with what some authorities read in Matthew xxv. 1—the virgins go forth " to meet the Bridegroom *and the*

Bride."* The wise virgins are not the bride, but they are called, as the guests in Matt. xxii., to share in the marriage supper.

IS THE CHURCH THE BRIDE ?

It may be readily premised that the subject of the church as the Bride of Christ is not prominent in the Epistles, any more than in the rest of Scripture. Indeed, we should not expect to find it in the Old Testament, where the church is still a hidden mystery. It would be difficult, however, to give up, as figurative references to this wonderful truth, such accounts as the seeking of a Bride for Isaac by the servant of Abraham, or the marriages of men like Joseph or Moses with wives outside the chosen race. It is, however, a misleading principle of exegesis to *base* doctrines on Old Testament figures. The fact, moreover, that the subject is dealt with by the Spirit with terseness and economy even in the New Testament need not trouble us, for this is not the only important truth, treated in the same way. Indeed such paucity of reference cuts both ways, and might be used equally to disprove Israel's claim to be Bride.

This being said, there are expressions here and there in the Epistles which, though not demonstrative, are in harmony with such a future relation between Christ and His church, as may be described by spiritual marriage ; thus, read in their context, such verses as : " He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit " (1 Cor. vi. 17), or " that we should be married (*gignomai* as in previous verse) to another,

* For this addition there is a considerable body of authority : the great Uncial MS. D. Codex Bezae at Cambridge, of the fifth or sixth century ; Codex X at Munich of the thirteenth century ; many cursive MSS. and the weighty authority of the Old Latin and Vulgate, as well as the oldest Syriac Versions, the Armenian Version, the Diatesseron of Tatian, the early Father—Hilary, and others.

even to Him that is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God " (Rom. vii. 4). The testimony of 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3, it will be admitted, goes further still—" I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty (she ought to have kept her place behind her husband, rather than affect the independent position), so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ." The words " simplicity which is in Christ," represent an idea quite foreign to the text. Of course it may be said that this is only figurative of Christian separation and devotion to the Lord; but the words certainly lend themselves to the thought that Paul regarded the Corinthian church as betrothed to Christ, and part of His future Bride. The word " present " here is the same as in the *locus classicus* of this subject—Ephesians v. 22-32—of the presentation of the church to Christ, of which the Old Testament parallel in view is the presentation of Eve to Adam by Jehovah, to be his wedded wife. This passage we will now consider. We may notice at once that the figure of Christ and the church is introduced here to enforce right relations between husbands and wives. That prepares us for something in Christ's relation to the church, parallel to that of husband to wife. Christ is therefore not said here to be the Head of the Body, but of the church, and the Saviour of the Body (v. 23): " Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ (*i.e.*, relationally), so are the wives to their own husbands in everything." (v. 23). In Ephesians i., the church is His Body, in chapter v.—His Bride. The same figure is preserved all through, and even when the Body is mentioned, we are not referred back to the formation of Adam's body in Gen. ii. 7, but to the formation of Eve, *out of*

his body in Gen. ii. 22. Again the exhortation to husbands to love their wives is based on the love of Christ to the church, not viewed as His Body, but as an object outside Himself, whom He loved, and for whom He gave Himself (v. 25), once more fitting into the relation of Bridegroom and Bride. Verse 26 speaks of the preparation of the Bride for that day of days, the great marriage celebration, when the Lord as a Divine Person will present His Bride to Himself "a Glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." A man does not need his own body to be presented to him, but his bride, so this is again the figure here. In verse 28, the figure is extended, but not changed. It does not say that the wife is the husband's body, but that he should love her as his own body. Adam did recognize Eve as a part of himself. "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man." (Gen. ii. 23). Now, however, she was a separate entity, and as such, became his wedded wife. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church." She also was taken out of Him, after His sleep of death at Calvary, and in this sense "we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." These later words are omitted in R.V., but there is a considerable body of authority in their favour, and I believe they fit in exactly with the thought of the passage, and reinforce the parallel between the formation of the Bride of Christ and that of Adam's helpmeet.

Once more verse 31 takes up the thought of the married state, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." We see, therefore, that though the thought

of the Body is introduced in this passage, it is entirely subservient, whereas the thought of the Bride is predominant throughout. In the truth of Christ's Body, union and supply are the principal features, in that of His Bride, love and communion.

To return to our Apocalyptic chapter, verse 9 is occupied no longer with the Bride, but with the guests, a most important distinction. The angel that spake with the apostle said, "Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." These are described in the gospels, as we have seen, as "the friends of the Bridegroom" (John iii. 29); "the children of the bridechamber" (Mark ix. 15); the invited guests of Matt. xxii. 8; the wise virgins of chapter xxv. Then patriarchs and prophets and kings will see the things they have desired to see, and will to have them too, in the day of rejoicing. Though playing a secondary part they will be in fullest sympathy with the Bridegroom, their Jehovah Redeemer. All that interests Him, will interest them, they will rejoice with fullness of joy at the sight of His joy. Such are indeed blessed.

The angel closes this portion of his message with the confirmative words, "These are the true sayings of God." But when John, dazzled by the majesty of the messenger, attempts to worship at his feet, the angel at once disclaims such a thing, he is only the fellow servant of John and his brethren; "Worship God! for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Are these words to be understood objectively, the testimony concerning Jesus, or subjectively, that which He renders? Both would be possible. We love to acknowledge that Christ is the underlying substance of prophecy, and that His glory is its final end. But I believe here the other sense fits the context better. The angel wishes to divert attention from himself to Him, in Whose name

he speaks, and Who as a Divine Person alone deserves all worship.

THE REVELATION FROM HEAVEN OF CHRIST IN GLORY

The passage we are about to consider marks a tremendous crisis in the world's history. It is the great climax of the Apocalyptic visions, indeed of the whole of the prophetic Scriptures. The mystery of God is finished, and Jesus Christ is "revealed from Heaven in flaming fire . . . taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel." Moses looked forward to this, beyond the destruction of Pharaoh and his host (Exod. xv.). Hannah sang of it, "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces" (1 Sam. ii. 10). Asaph foretold it, "Our God shall come and shall not keep silence" (Psa. 1. 3); David, too, in Psalm lxviii; and so through all the prophets, ending up with Zechariah "The Lord My God shall come, and all the saints with thee" (chap. xiv. 5), and Malachi "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven" (chap. iv. 1). This is also the coming of the Son of Man, foretold by the Lord in His great prophetic discourse (Matt. xxiv., etc.). The apostle sees "the heaven opened" and "behold a white horse." It is no longer what is going on in heaven, but heaven in relation to the earth. An opened heaven always stands for some divine manifestation, some special intercommunication between heaven and earth. Thus in Ezekiel i. 1, the heavens are opened to the prophet, and he sees visions of God in the Person of His Christ, in special connection with His ministry on earth in its fourfold aspect. In Matt. iii. 16, we read the same words of our Lord Himself, "the heavens were opened unto Him, and He was sealed

with the Spirit and attested by the Father from heaven. So the Lord foretold to Nathaniel a sight he would see in a millennial day, "the heavens open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." But before that can happen the scene of which we are reading now must take place. The door will not be opened as in chapter iv. to let John into heaven, but to allow "the full display of the glory and power of the Lord Himself, and His hosts, in judgment" upon His enemies. This is the day of vengeance. The wrath of the Lamb is now really to be displayed. Clearly the rider here is not to be identified with the rider on the white horse of chapter vi. Those victories were followed by revolution, famine, and death, these by acts of righteousness and peace. He is vested with fourfold titles; the first is characteristic, He is called "Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war" (v. 11). Evil men will have mocked at the thought of His coming, or counted Him "slack concerning His promise," and even the hope of the faithful remnant of Israel will have been severely tried, but He will prove in their extremity faithful to them and true to His promises that "in righteousness" for God's righteousness must be displayed in His judgment of unbelievers, as in His justification of believers.

"His eyes were as a flame of fire," to the prophet, phrase reminiscent of chapter i. 14, marking, as then, His all-seeing discernment in judgment. "And on His head were many crowns." Hitherto we have seen the Lord crowned with the victor's crown (stephanos)—the word used in 1 Cor. ix.; Rev. ii. 10; iii. 11; iv. 4; and in xii. 1, but in verse 3 of this last-named chapter, the dragon's crowns are diadems as here, the symbols of his usurped kingly power, and so also in chapter xiii. 1. These are the

three occurrences of the word in the New Testament. "*Stephanos*," then is the badge of victory, "*diadēma*" of royalty. These diadems represent our Lord's kingly rights. "He had a name written, that no man knew, but He himself." This is distinct from all His other names and titles. Many have been the suggestions as to what it is and all such enquiries are vain, for it is clear that it is His secret name and for Him alone to know. The key to the right understanding of its nature will be found in chapter ii. 17, where the overcomer is promised "a new name written which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." It would seem that that name will express and sum up God's appreciation of every one of His true people, known to each alone." So will this secret name of Christ divinely express God's infinite appreciation of the work and Person of His Beloved Son. "He was clothed in vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God." It is difficult not to connect this blood-sprinkled vesture with the description of the return of Christ from the slaughter of His enemies in Edom and Bozrah, when "He treads the winepress alone" as it would seem *prior* to His Personal return (see Isaiah lxiii.). That vesture will then speak of judgment already executed. This, the third of the Lord's titles, is His divine name representing His relation to God as the Eternal Son. It only occurs in John. The *Logos* is not the Word merely as an attribute of God, nor yet as a Personification, but as a Divine Person, "For the Word was God—the same was in the beginning with God." So "the Word became flesh" in the Person of Jesus, but He was no less the Word. "And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." We know from other Scriptures (*e.g.*, Matt. xiii. 41; 2 Thess. i. 7), that angels will accompany

Christ. But here it would seem, from the dress being that of the redeemed, that only such are mentioned here. They will not need to fight. "*He* doth make war." "Out of *His* mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it *He* should smite the nations . . . and *He* treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." Their work will be subsidiary. They will witness to the resources of His mighty power. Their garments will be of fine linen as in verse 8, but there the whiteness is bright (*lampros*); its beauty is emphasized, here merely "white" (*leukos*), for its unsulliedness is evidenced. "The ruling, with a rod of iron," will come later; here and now it is the execution of judgment: His prerogative alone (John v. 27). "And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." This is His fourth title. He reigns already, He ruleth in the heavens; His visible reign is now to be set up on the earth in the place of His rejection, and "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BEAST AND HIS ARMIES

In Christendom, even when Christ's personal return is not, as is usually the case, frankly denied, the utmost concession is His possible return at the end of the millennium—a period of universal peace and prosperity, introduced by man himself by means of social legislation, intensive education and religious effort. Earth will then have become an annex of heaven, and Christ will naturally return to such a scene! Exactly the reverse is the truth. Never will conditions be more wretched or man more wicked than when Christ returns to set up His Kingdom.

Let Soviet Russia illustrate what will then be much the general conditions at least among the nations of Christendom. Man under Satan's tutelage will have made earth a veritable annex of hell, and Christ's intervention in judgment will be imperative: "He will break them in pieces like a potter's vessel"; and this passage proves it.

It begins with a public proclamation of a nature to fix the attention of all on the judgment about to fall. "And I saw an (Greek, one) angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls . . . Come and gather yourselves together unto the great supper of God."*

How different this from the invitation earlier in the chapter to that other supper—the marriage supper of the Lamb; there, the guests are invited to feast with the Redeemer and His Bride; here, to gorge themselves on His enemies—"the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men . . . and the flesh of all, both free and bound, both small and great." This recalls the previous scene of carnage on the mountains of Israel—when the Northern Army—the hosts of Rosh, Mesheck, Tubal—will be destroyed (Joel ii. 20, 21; Ezek. xxxix. and xl.). There beasts will join in the feast, here only ravenous birds for it would hardly do to have the valley of Jehoshaphat swarming with beasts of prey. The Judgment of the Northern Army will be carried out by natural means, miraculously occurring, pestilence, rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone, but not as here by the personal intervention of Christ (Ezek. xxxviii. 22).

The call to the ravenous birds comes, it may be noted, before the conflict, for the result is a foregone conclusion. When once God draws His glittering sword, He will make "a short work on the earth."

* Doubtless the true reading.

Satan and his angelic hosts will be as nothing ; the kings of the earth and their mighty armies with all their modern inventions, will be "like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors," when the stone cut out without hands falls on the feet of the Gentile image (see Dan. ii. 35). Now God's mercy restrains His vengeance ; then in the day of His power "the Lord will do great things," and "all His enemies shall lick the dust."

The guests are convoked, now the supper is prepared, "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse."

This final conflict is usually spoken of as the battle of Armageddon. This is based on the expression in chapter xvi., "the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . and He gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." (vv. 14, 16). In a previous verse we see it will be in the mind of Satan and his men to gather the kings of the earth together, but they will only be carrying out God's purpose. Armageddon is the hill or city of Megiddo, a fortified city in the tribe of Manasseh, in the boundary of Issachar. Megiddo means a place of multitudes, from a root *gah-dad*, meaning to crowd together in great numbers (see Psa. xciv. 21 ; Micah v. 1), truly a prophetic name, if we think how many armies have assembled there. It was a famous battleground in old Testament history ; there fought Barak with Sisera and the hosts of Jabin (Judges v. 19) ; and in the same neighbourhood, Gideon with the Midianites. Near by in Mt. Gilboa, Saul died at the hands of the Philistines, and in the valley itself, Josiah fought with Pharaoh Necho. There need be no doubt that in this very place the great armies of a future, perhaps a near future day, will be assembled. That will be their rallying point,

the *base* of their far-flung operations, but it is equally clear that the battle-front, the spear-head of their attack on Jerusalem will be in the valley of Jehoshaphat, to the south-east of the city, usually known as the Valley of the Kedron, *e.g.*, "Let the heathen (or Gentiles) be wakened and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about" (Joel iii. 12, etc.), and again: "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle. . . . Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle" (Zech. xiv. 2, 3). Satan and his great rebel leaders will gather their hosts in direct and open opposition to the Christ of God. On the one side will be the King of Kings and the armies of heaven, on the other Satan, the beast, and the false prophet (the first and the second beasts of chapter xiii.), and the ten kings of the Roman Earth. The kingly rank of the latter will now be merged in his religious character, as the witness to the first beast; hence he is now called the false prophet. The battle takes an altogether unique course. It begins where the greatest defeat may end, in the capture of the two rebel leaders. Their heinous guilt is manifest to all, no further trial is needed; they are singled out for summary and, till now, unheard-of judgment. As two outstanding witnesses for God in dark, Old Testament days, the prophets Enoch and Elijah, were singled out for the unique treatment of translation without dying into the heavenly sphere, so these arch-deceivers, a Gentile and a Jew, are cast alive into the "lake of fire burning with brimstone." The rest of the host will meet with a less terrible, but no less summary fate, they will all be slain, after having been smitten with the terrible plague described by Zechariah, they and their cattle, and "a great tumult from the Lord shall be among them:

and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem." But ultimately it is the Lord who executes the judgment. "The remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth"; corresponding to "the spirit of His mouth and the brightness of His coming" of 2 Thess. ii. 8. Nor will the ravenous birds be disappointed of their feast, for "all the fowls were filled with their flesh."

CHAPTER XX

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM

AFTER the overwhelming destruction of the beast and the false prophet, and their rebel hosts, Satan is at once dealt with, but in a different way. An angel is seen to come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He lays hold on the powerful angelic enemy and binds him : one angel suffices, for he is acting for God. This terrible being, as in chapter xii., is identified in a fourfold way, first as the dragon, pre-eminent in rebellion and depravity, the once covering cherub transformed by sin into a hideous monster. Next, he is spoken of as the old serpent—marking his long and tortuous course of deception and fraud ; then as the devil, in his hatred of God's people, accusing them night and day before God ; and, lastly, as Satan, in his undying hostility to God and man. It is indeed of God's rich mercy that " He has laid help on One that is mighty " ; One who is stronger than the strong One—the glorified Jesus—the Son of God on the throne of God—the Faithful and True—the Advocate of His people—the " Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Truly " if God be for us, who can be against us ? " To resume, this awful being—the chief of God's works, the " king of all the sons of pride," is bound with the great chain and consigned, not yet to the lake of fire, nor yet to Hades, the place of departed human wicked spirits, but to a dread prison-house, the bottomless pit or abyss, shut up and sealed there, so as not to deceive

the nations for the thousand years of the millennial reign. This place is referred to nine times in the New Testament. Once in Luke viii. 31, where the demons pray not to be sent into the *deep*. It is translated in the same way in Rom. x. 7, though, I would judge, used there in a more general sense, "Who shall descend into *the deep*, that is to bring Christ up from the dead?" Then it is found seven times in the Apocalypse, and always, I believe, in the same technical sense as here (see Rev. ix. 1, 2, 11; xi. 7; xviii. 8, and here, xx. 1 and 3). In only one passage, chapter xi. 7, is a human being connected with this place, "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit," destined to play a further role on the earth as the Man of Sin. Some may feel surprise that the rebel human chiefs are cast into the lake of fire, and Satan into a less terrible confinement. The explanation is simple; there is no resurrection from the second death, and therefore no possible exit for those cast into that which embodies it. But Satan has a further brief opportunity of evil awaiting him at the close of the millennium, to fill up his brimming cup of iniquity to the overflow and at the same time be a final test of man.

The next verse introduces us to scenes of judgment of very varied categories. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them." This is, with no reasonable doubt the judgment of the living nations described in Matthew xxv. 31, etc., as occurring just here, "*When the Son of Man shall come in His glory.*" Besides this, there is another judgment spoken of in Matthew xix. 28, in like terms as passing at the same time, namely, of the twelve tribes of Israel by the twelve apostles, as assessors of Him, to Whom all judgment is committed. The question at stake in these two judgments will be widely different; at the former it will be, whether

or no those on trial are worthy to *share* in the Kingdom; at the latter as to the position those judged are to occupy in that Kingdom—according to their faithfulness, for the twelve tribes will be represented there by the saved remnant of Israel. But not only will there be a judgment of living persons, but also of persons raised from the dead—the faithful martyrs of the great tribulation; they, too, it would seem, will be judged for their reward, if not in the earthly Kingdom, in the heavenly, in which the New Testament saints will also have their part, a Kingdom in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and those who followed their faith, will sit down, and of which Christ will be King as of the earthly sphere.

There will thus be the heavenly and earthly sides of the Kingdom, but one King of both, and intercommunication between heaven and earth, when the true Jacob's ladder will be set up and "angels of God will be seen ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

This resurrection will complete "the first resurrection," of which Christ was the first-fruits and in which all the saints of all time will share "every man in his own order or rank." When that moment arrives not a single saint of God of any dispensation will remain in the grave, and we may add not a single one of the wicked dead will have been raised. "The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (v. 5). The raised, with the saved of Israel and the spared nations, will live and reign with Christ a thousand years.

Then follows the description of those who share in the first resurrection, their immunity from death and their functions in the Kingdom. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign

with Him a thousand years " (v. 6). It is taught by some that such a description as " blessed and holy," represents a certain degree of attainment by some inner circle of the redeemed. I believe this is erroneous teaching ; rather the description is characteristic of all the people of God of every age. It is not an attainment of a child of God to be " blessed and holy " in this sense, but a characteristic attribute of all such. Is not a sinner " blessed " the moment he believes ? Does he not become at once a *saint* of God ? The repentant thief was both these before he breathed his last. He became an heir of heaven, " This day thou shalt be in Paradise." He was also set apart for God, " With Me." Not only so, but he manifested it in the short space allotted to him. Where there is life, there will be certainly a measure of practical holiness. If profession of faith leaves a man in a course of ungodliness and untruthfulness, there is no proof that the Spirit of God has done a work in his soul, however fluent and glib may be his words.

Surely the next phrase should suffice to show that all believers are intended, for immunity from the second death is the prerogative of all such (see, *e.g.*, John vi. 50, 58 ; viii. 51 ; xi. 26). Next, the occupations of the saints are indicated. They will be priests unto God ; in the case of the saved of Israel themselves worshipping, and leading the worship of the spared nations of the earth. They will also reign with Christ—that is, share in the administration of the Kingdom during the thousand years.

THE FINAL TEST

The golden age of the Kingdom will last a thousand years, during which righteousness will reign, and peace, prosperity, and the knowledge of God be

universally enjoyed. But this will not entail universal conversion, and all profession must be tested. For this, Satan, who will have passed the same period in the abyss, will be loosed for a little season. The character of this terrible prison may be best estimated by what happened in chapter ix. 7, when it was opened—"There arose a smoke out of the pit (abyss) as the smoke of a great furnace," and at the same time issued forth swarms of malignant spirits. We may be sure it will have been for Satan a place of duress vile and severest discipline. Will the experience of a thousand years of this have changed him? Not in the smallest degree. He will come forth the same hopelessly wicked being, that he went in, actuated by the same determined hostility to God and man, and will at once fall to at his old work. "He shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle." Will not a thousand years under the beneficent sway of Christ and the manifested glory of God suffice to render men immune to his temptations, will they not have radically changed for the better, and become by the altered conditions of life and the absence of Satanic temptation, children of God and lovers of His will. Alas! it will be proved once more that man whatever his advantages and environment, apart from the grace of God and the new birth, remains at heart only evil and at enmity with God. The word translated "quarters" is more properly "corners," as in Rev. vii. 1, that is the extreme limits of the earth, the farthest removed from the City of the Great King. It is easy to understand that when Jerusalem becomes the metropolis of the world, she will attract to herself the blessed of the nations called to share "in the inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the earth," who will naturally occupy the lands nearest

the centre of authority and worship. All these will be saved. Then there will be the remnants of the nations who went up against Jerusalem, and the spared nations of the earth—allowed to continue as such. These two latter classes are distinguished in Zech. xiv. 16 and 17—"all the families of the earth," though both seem capable of disobedience and will be ruled with a rod of iron. They and their seed will need conversion.

It is easy to see how extraordinarily the population of the world will increase in a thousand years of peace and plenty, and replenish the earth to its utmost limits. It will be among these immense populations, the farthest removed from the reigning centre, that Satan will seek to carry out his work of deception, and will succeed only too well. The length of the period of Satan's liberty is not defined. It is called "a little season." It may last forty years; "forty" being a not infrequent number in the Scriptures in connection with testing. This would afford full time to Satan for the development of his plans; a rebellion against God on a gigantic scale. Such would evidently take some time to mature. Those deceived are called "Gog and Magog and their number is as the sand of the sea." These names are obviously not used in the same sense as in Ezekiel xxxviii. and xxxix. as referring to those Northern powers, Russia, Gomer, Togarmah, etc., who will have met their doom on the mountains of Israel, before the millennium. The names meaning "extension" and "expansion," are used here in their generic sense to represent the extent and volume of the nations from whom will spring the rebel hosts. They will go "up on the breadth of the earth," that is, so great will be the numbers that they will seem to come from every point of the compass, and to fill the earth. Their objective will be twofold; "they compass the camp

of the saints about and the beloved city." The latter expression can only mean, Jerusalem; the "camp of the saints," is not so clear. I would suggest that it represents the holy oblation of the priests, the portion of the Levites, and the profane place of the city, with the city in the midst, a square of 25,000 reeds* in all for each side (Ezekiel xlviii. 8-15). These rebel hosts gather together to battle, but the day for battles is past. The saints have but to sit still and see the salvation of God, for "fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured these their enemies."

Then at last final judgment falls on the author of all evil, the father of lies, the murderer from the beginning: "The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and *they* shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." It has been alleged by annihilationists that everything cast into the lake of fire will be consumed like chaff cast into fire, but though the two human leaders were cast into that fearful place a thousand years before, they are found still existing there. The fire instead of consuming them, has actually preserved them, they have been "salted with fire" (Mark ix. 49), and will never cease to exist. They and the devil (for the verb is in the plural—*basanisthēsontai*) will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." That is, as long as God lives and His glory endures, so long will the wicked, angelic and human, exist under His righteous judgment.

THE LAST JUDGMENT

We now come to the closing scene of this world's history—the final assize of the dead. This is the last

* A reed is $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet, so that this portion of land would be $45\frac{1}{2}$ miles square and contain 2070 square miles.

phase in the victory of God over all His foes, promised to and through the Son, "Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool" (Psa. cx. 1). This is what is referred to in the words "Then cometh the end, when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death" (1 Cor. xv. 24-26 R.V.). This "delivering up" means the restoring of the Kingdom to God, even the Father by the Son purged of every foe, angelic or human, but without prejudice to His continuing to reign as God's vice-gerent, for it is again and again stated that "He shall reign for ever and ever," and "of His Kingdom there shall be no end." "It shall stand for ever" (Dan. ii. 44; Luke i. 33; Rev. xi. 15). First, then, the judgment throne is set up, "*I saw a great white throne.*" Its whiteness is symbolic of its inexorable justice. No altar is seen before it, as in Isaiah's vision of the throne of His glory (chap. vi.); nor any blood-sprinkled mercy-seat, as in the Temple. Nothing but a naked throne of unsullied purity, the claims of which are now to be finally and eternally vindicated.

It is the One on it that gives to it its character, "*and Him that sat upon it.*" It is He Whom God ordained for that very purpose—the Son unto Whom the Father "hath committed all judgment" and to Whom "He has given authority to execute it because He is the Son of Man" (Acts xvii. 31; John v. 22, 27). He is truly Man, but truly God. Nor will He have changed since the days of His flesh. Did He then know the secrets of men's hearts? He will know them still on the throne. Did He then read as in a book, the life-history of each individual? (John v. 6; ix. 3; xxi. 18). He will read it the same

on the throne. Could He then define the attitude of each one to Himself? (John vi. 64). He will know it no less on the throne. Could He prove men's consciences during His earthly ministry and read their innermost thoughts? He then knew all men and things. Will He know them less at the Last Day? He will be the same Omniscient One as ever. He will weigh the responsibility of each, as He did in the days of His flesh of Sodom and Capernaum, of Tyre and Bethsaida. He will be as truly qualified to be the Judge of men, as He was to be their Saviour. Once His face was marred more than any man's, but full of tender mercy and compassion, but now so terrible is that face of infinite righteousness that from before it "*the earth and the heaven fled away and there was found no place for them.*"

This will be "the end of the world" in the sense so often mistakenly referred to where "the end of the age" would be correct, and at last literally realized according to the threefold prophecy of Peter, "the heavens and earth which are now, by the same word, kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men": "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the earth . . . shall be burned up," a fact which even scientists, with the little positive knowledge they have, affirm to be a quite possible event. Then the reason is given—"the coming of the day of God" (2 Peter iii. 7, 10, 12, R.V.). The next object seen by the apostle was those to be judged, "*And I saw the dead great and small stand before the throne.*"* They have been summoned from their graves by the voice of the Son of Man. It is clearly a resurrection, but cannot be a "general resurrection," a conceit which only exists in the minds of certain ecclesiastics. Does not the expression earlier in the chapter,

* This seems to be the right reading instead of "God."

"This is the first resurrection," prove it, taken with those other words, "But the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years are finished." Those were raised in different stages the redeemed of all ages from Abel onwards. These are the wicked of all ages—the evil-doers of John v. 29—from Cain onwards. There is a resurrection to life, and there is a resurrection to judgment.

The question is often raised whether there will be any of God's people among them? I believe the true answer to be a decided negative. For one thing the expression "the resurrection to judgment" would point to this; not only so but those judged are still called "dead," though raised, that is they are spiritually dead, they are of those who "will never see life" because unbelievers (John iii. 36). And how could even "believers" hope to be justified if "judged according to their works"? Indeed of believers of the present dispensation it is asserted, "they shall not come into judgment" (John v. 24); so that they cannot be included here. As we have seen, Peter speaks of this assize as "the day of judgment and perdition of *ungodly* men" (2 Pet. iii. 7). There will be judgment, as Paul says, "of the just and of *the unjust*" (Acts xxiv. 15). Does not the specification of the two classes lend itself to the thought of separate judgments? A general judgment is as unscriptural as a general resurrection.

The redeemed will be there, but only as assessors of their Redeemer the Judge; also, I believe in the sense that the words "the saints shall judge the world"* are to be understood. The Queen of Sheba, we read, will rise and condemn the indifference of a succeeding generation to one greater than Solomon; the repentant Ninevites will condemn those who refuse the word of a greater than Jonah. No doubt

* They will also judge angels—though not here.

these are only specimens of innumerable instances of a like character. Perhaps every dead one from Cain downwards will have had some witness for God in his time, whom he knew, and who will rise and condemn him.

Next, the records of the past are unrolled "*And books were opened.*" The thought of such records is not foreign even to the Old Testament prophets, see Isaiah xxx. 8, where a record is inscribed by Jehovah's direction, and Jer. xvii. 1, where the sin of Judah is said to be written on their own hearts and on the horns of their altars. Man is writing his record in his own memory and that record will tally with God's. Happy those who, judging themselves as altogether guilty, now flee with contrite hearts to Him whose blood cleanseth from all sin. But yet "*another book is opened, which is the book of life,*" that every one may scrutinize it to find their names, if possible, therein. This opportunity afforded, the judgment proceeds to its terrible issue. *And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.* It is true that on such a principle no flesh could be justified. But in reality it is not here a question of justification or the reverse. All that vast throng are "condemned already"; the question is as to the degree of their doom. Every allowance possible in righteousness will be made; questions of light and opportunity, determining responsibility, will be weighed in each case, and the penalty will be in proportion to the guilt. Sodom and Gomorrah will have a more tolerable lot than Bethsaida and Capernaum, and these again, we may well believe, than countries where the gospel has been preached in every town and village and hamlet.

Verse 13 is parenthetical and retrospective. It supplies the details of the resurrection of "the dead"

of verse 12 from the two great burying-places—the sea and the grave, as I believe we must understand “ death ” here. The word Hell is “ Hades,” the place of departed spirits, not Gehenna. They are now once more united to their bodies in resurrection. Then “ death ” and Hades, brought into being by the fact of sin, and having served their purpose, are, as though personified, cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. As for the dead before the throne, there will not be one for whom Christ did not give Himself a ransom, not one who will not have had a sufficient light to repent, not one who will not have himself to blame for being lost.

The solemn description ends with the terrible and irreversible sentence, “ *Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*” What an urgent appeal do such words address to the unrepentant to flee, here and now, from the wrath to come !

CHAPTER XXI

THE ETERNAL STATE

THIS chapter introduces us to the Eternal State—the Day of God.* The long black history of angelic and human rebellion has run its course. The powers of evil have employed every power and device: they have done their worst, but in vain. God's right to rule in His universe has been fully vindicated. He has been "justified in His sayings and has overcome when judged" (Rom. iii. 3). Now heavens and earth have been purged of every rebel, but not even that can cleanse them† from the defilement contracted by the entrance of sin. Both must be superseded. "*I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away*" (v. 1). No doubt the new will differ from the old in many ways, but Peter adds one outstanding novelty: Whereas in the former earth righteousness *reigned*, now, in the absence of every hostile force, it will dwell—"wherein *dwelleth* righteousness" (2 Pet. iii. 13).

It is remarkable that even to Israel God foretold these things; "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind . . . for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy"

* The day of the Lord in which ("en hee") the first heavens and earth shall be destroyed by fire will be succeeded by the day of God, and it is in view of this ("di' heen") that the former things are removed.

† Not, of course, the Heaven of Heavens, the dwelling-place of God which could never be affected by the rebellion of angels, or need recreating.

(Isaiah lxxv. 17). Here it is clearly a literal earthly city, which I take it, though beginning in the millennial reign is to continue for ever as the centre of God's earthly people, and those who will share with them the earthly Kingdom, on the New Earth. This agrees with earlier words of the same prophet. "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end ; upon the throne of David and upon His Kingdom to order it and establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. ix. 7). If such expressions are to be interpreted merely of the millennium, then words cease to have any definite meaning. Moreover they tally exactly with Gabriel's address to Mary, "The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob *for ever* ; and of His Kingdom there shall be *no end*." There seems no legitimate escape from the plain and literal meaning of these words, that the earthly Kingdom will be as everlasting as the heavenly. Surely a sufficient answer to those who would eliminate all earthly terms such as men, nations, kings, healing, from the eternal state is the fact that it will please God to make a new *Earth*, as well as a new Heaven. Another point is added here which must certainly impress us, "*There was no more sea.*" The troubled sea is the emblem of the wicked in their restlessness, "casting up mire and dirt" ; and also stands for the rebellion of man lifting up his head against God, but He can tread it down, though He alone (Job. ix. 8). It would seem that the gathering together of the sea in Gen. i. 9, marked the partial removal of that judgment which had overwhelmed the original creation between Gen. i. 1, 2, and turned its primal beauty and perfection into a watery waste, "without form and void." The total removal of the sea will therefore also mark the final removal of that

which stands for judgment. The next verse introduces God in relation to the New Earth. John has a vision of the New Jerusalem, "And I John saw the holy city new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven." Heaven and earth will not be separated in the Eternal state by a vast gulf, as we think of them now. Their distinction then will be rather of condition than of distance.

This has been generally overlooked and has seriously interfered, I believe, with the true understanding of the chapter. If we start with an *ex-parte* assumption that such and such an earthly condition is quite incompatible with the Eternal State, we are obliged to refer back the major part of this chapter to the millennial Kingdom, as indeed is usually done, but, I would submit without sufficient reason.

Reasons have been adduced in chapter xix., for believing that the Bride of the Lamb is the Church. Here we see her as a city. This is as we should expect. Babylon the Great, Satan's religious counterfeit—is represented by a whore and a city, the first figure symbolizing her corruption, the second her world-wide influence, embracing all who dwell within her shadow. So is the case of the reality the Bride of the Lamb, she too is presented in the same two-fold character—in chapter xix. as the woman, here as the city in her manifested glory in relation to the New Creation, and including, it may be, much beyond her immediate belongings. To many, the fact of the Bride being called the New Jerusalem would be sufficient to connect her with Israel, but such a conclusion hardly seems justified. For instance, the apostle Paul in writing to the Galatians, and specially emphasizing the contrast and incompatibility between Judaism and Christianity, nevertheless speaks of "Jerusalem which is above . . . which is the mother of us all" (iv. 26), and also in chapter vi.

16, he speaks of Christians as "the Israel of God," where literal Israel cannot be intended. It may be also seriously questioned whether Israel is ever spoken of as "the Tabernacle of God." That there is nothing necessarily temporary in this figure seems clear from the expression "everlasting habitations"—(Schēnē, —Luke xvi. 9). The word occurs in Rev. xiii. 6; xv. 5 apparently of the dwelling-place of God. God was *with* Israel by His Spirit, but the Lord foretells, by contrast, to His disciples, the time soon to be realized, when that Spirit would be more than with, but *in* them. "He shall be in you" (John xiv. 17). This agrees with Paul's words to the Ephesians: "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 21, 22).

One additional trait is mentioned, the city is described as "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," that is, though the thought of a city in bridal dress does not lend itself to close analysis, she is decked in gala array, as befitting her relation to God and the Lamb.

Even in human marriage, though the bridal festivities soon come to an end, the married wife retains for a time her quality of bride. These festivities, begun on that memorable marriage day when He first presented her to Himself a glorious church purchased by His blood, cleansed by His Word and sanctified by His Spirit, will never cease, nor will the Lamb's Wife ever lose her bridal character.

LAST THINGS

The words about to occupy us hardly seem in strict sequence with what has just preceded, but to describe further that is to prepare for that scene.

"*And He that sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'*" What throne is referred to is not quite clear; the voice of verse 3 proceeds from heaven, but there is no mention of a throne, since the previous chapter, at verse 11, "the great white throne," and I see no valid reason to seek for another. For it was before Him that sat on that throne that the first earth and heaven had fled away. What could be more suitable than that from that very throne of judgment and justice, the decree should go forth to make all things new? This goes further than the new heaven and earth, namely, all things in them. Christ was the One through Whom and for Whom all the first things were created, so now through Him and for Him all things are made anew. The first creation was perfect, but became marred in part by sin; now nothing of the old must remain; even the unsullied part of the Created Universe must be renewed, that is of course all that pertains in it to the elect or redeemed. How wonderful and inexhaustible are God's resources! All now will be made new. This is part of the victory of the cross. The resurrection was the first step. Christ became the beginning of the New Creation; now the whole Universe must be lifted out of the past with its testings, failures, struggles, judgments, and be made to answer fully to the mind of God.

Of this the assurance is granted to John and through him to us, "*And He said unto me—Write: for these words are true and faithful,*" and no sooner said than, in the purpose of God, accomplished. *And He said unto me, It is done* and that because it rests on what Christ is, in Whom all the purposes of God are secure. "*I am Alpha and Omega*" (that is, as we say A to Z, the long O being the last letter of the Greek alphabet), *the beginning and the ending.* Both the first and the New Creation are only an

interlude in God's Eternal Being. He was the Alpha—before all things. He is the Omega, in which all things find their consummation, the beginning . . . without beginning, the ending without end, the Infinite, the Unchanging, the Eternal One. In three other places this expression occurs in the Apocalypse. Twice in chapter i., in verse 8, in connection with the Lord's coming in glory, "*Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him,*" and in verse 11, in connection with the Lord's glory in the midst of the Church; then in chapter xxii. 13, in connection with His glory as the Coming One for His saints, and here in connection with His glory as the Repairer of the breaches—the re-Maker of all things. But one more promise to the thirsty soul is not forgotten, "*I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely,*" nor one more exhortation to the professed believer, "*He that overcometh shall inherit all things and I will be his God and he shall be My son,*" nor one more terrible warning to him who goes on in his sins, "*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.*"

These verses throw valuable light on the meaning of "overcoming" in the Scriptures. It is by many taken, but wrongly, I think, to describe a peculiar type of Christian, in contrast with the ordinary believer; certainly such differences do exist; some are leading lives of more practical victory over sin, self, and the world than others. But though that be readily granted, I do not believe that the Word of God divides believers into two classes, overcomers and non-overcomers. Rather the overcomer is one who, though overcome sometimes, like Joshua by Amalek, prevails at the last (see Exod. xvii.). Such,

by their continuance in the faith, prove that they have been truly born again, they overcome at last. Of such were Samson, David, Peter, John, Mark, and even the dying thief. We saw in our study of the messages to the Seven Churches that the overcomers represented the true seed in those Churches. There were even then, as no doubt, alas, also now, mere professors among their membership. Such a thought calls us "to make our calling and election sure," to "know whom we have believed," and feel our absolute need of His preserving grace. This agrees with what we read in 1 John verses 4 and 5, "Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" In chapter iv. 4, overcoming the Antichrists is in question, "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." In each case the overcoming depends on something which is, common to all true believers, the new birth, faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and the indwelling Spirit. Here we have a further proof of the same thing: the antithesis to overcoming and inheriting all things, is being a characteristically wicked person, and being lost for ever; there is no third class between the two. All are included in the two classes described here, overcomers and overcome, the latter detailed in an eight-fold category—the fearful, those I take it, who through fear of consequences, never yield to God; the unbelievers a genus of countless species; the abominable, who have made themselves foul and abhorrent; murderers of every kind; whoremongers, inclusive of every unclean species; sorcerers, including all dealers with demons, magic, or spiritism; idolaters, civilized and heathen, and all liars. This

is one of those three terrible warnings, as to the sin of lying, in the very last pages of Scripture. All these will have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. They will all have gone there by their own fatal choice, they are all there in their own individual character of sin.

It is sometimes affirmed that since Christ died for all, He must have borne all the sins of all men and that therefore all sins are forgiven to everybody, except the sin of unbelief which alone remains. It is hardly possible to conceive a greater travesty of the gospel. It is perfectly and blessedly true that God has provided in the sacrifice of Christ a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the whole world. All may be saved potentially, and to this end the apostles preached Christ crucified and risen as the object of faith, but only in the Epistles are the children of God taught the precious truth that "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree." That is the family secret. The work of Christ does not touch the *sins* of any individuals before faith, in the case of all able to exercise it. No doubt the company detailed here are lost, because of unbelief in some form or other, but the character and sins peculiar to each, will attach to them for ever. How solemn is this, taken in connection with the scene of blessedness described in the previous verses. There we see that "God is love" here that "God is light."

THE HOLY JERUSALEM DESCRIBED

Clearly a new section begins at verse 9. But the break is not so marked as many think. The usual interpretation of a certain school, that the closing description of the Heavenly Jerusalem merely reverts to a millennial scene seems untenable, if

carefully considered. That there are such reversions in the Apocalypse is admitted but each case must be judged by itself. It seems unlikely that after the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth, there should be a reversion to what is so closely united with the first earth—the millennium. The reasons alleged for holding this view are certain expressions, such as “the nations of them that are saved,” “the kings of the earth,” and in the next chapter “the healing of the nations,” which are said to be incompatible with the eternal state. But that there will be a New Earth in the Eternal State which will be inhabited, is, as we have already noted, certain ; so that we must hesitate to be too arbitrary on these points. The fact that nations were not in God’s original ordering of the race, but arose as the effect of rebellion and must therefore be a temporary expedient, is not a strong argument, as the same might be said of Israel, for was not Abraham called out as the result of the general lapse into idolatry ? Yet we know that Israel was no afterthought with God, and will for ever be His earthly people. The expression “nations of them that are saved” * need only mean the saved populations of the earth, and “the kings,” the hierarchies of the saved of Israel. Government does not necessarily imply repression, but direction and the well-ordering of things. I think there is a cogent reason for affirming that the city described here goes far beyond the millennial state, and it is, that it is the same city that the apostle saw coming down from God (in verse 2) which follows immediately on the creation of the

* Omitted by the R.V., but we must seek grace to hold fast to very many phrases, etc., omitted by the R.V. on most inadequate grounds for the most part. Omissions are frequent in Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) and Codex Vaticanus (B) the two Uncial MSS. especially affected by the Revision Majority, but by many believed to be very untrustworthy and corrupt authorities.

New Heaven, and belongs, therefore, to the Eternal State. How can they be different cities, when they are described in almost identical terms?—Both are called “the holy city,” both are viewed as a bride, and both are seen “descending out of heaven from God.” The identical description proves the identity of the cities described. The view here propounded restores the symmetry of the chapter, which the other dislocates. In verse 2 the view of the city is a glimpse, here a detailed survey. And it is one of the vial-angels who is appointed for the service, and what more appropriate than that one of those who had been used for the destruction of the City of Babylon, the great whore, should be used to reveal the true bride. “He shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.” The whole section, chapter xxi. 9-22, 5, may be briefly divided under nine headings: (1) The glory of the city, verse 11; (2) Her construction, verse 12-14; (3) Her measurements, verses 15-17; (4) Her materials, verses 18-21; (5) Her relations to God, verses 22-23; (6) Her relations to man, verses 24-25; (7) Her conditions of entrance, verse 27; (8) Her supply of blessing, chapter xxii. 2; (9) Her inhabitants and their occupation, verses 3-5.

(1) THE GLORY OF THE CITY: She is said to *have* the glory of God, etc. She does not possess it intrinsically for she is not, nor ever could be divine, nor merely reflect it; she possesses it, because indwelt by God as His tabernacle. It is His light shining out of her. There is a glory of Christ, which His people can only behold (John xvii. 24), another which He has given them (v. 22), and it is this here. It is the “Shekinah” glory (Shah-kan—to dwell) shining out from God’s dwelling-place. “Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages world without end.” Her light is likened to “a jasper

stone clear as crystal,"—some stone very different from our opaque jasper, but transparent like a diamond.

(2) HER CONSTRUCTION: She is surrounded by a wall great and high: speaking of separation (*e.g.*, the wall of partition, Eph. ii.), and security—for the city presents us the church, a very definite company of the redeemed, which cannot be confused, or be made to coalesce with other circles. The twelve gates speak of access, but again of restricted access—as the twelve angels guarding the gates testify. On the gates are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The city though separated characteristically, will not eliminate from all participation in her privileges the redeemed of Israel. In the wall are twelve foundations and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb—It is "built upon the foundation of the apostles"—*i.e.*, their testimony to the glories of Christ, what we speak of as the fundamental truths circling round His Person, Word and Work. Christ is the one foundation; "and that foundation standeth sure"—foundation truths are assailed and may be overthrown. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" We see this baneful work going on round us, and in the experience of multitudes "the foundations are being destroyed," though, of course, not one jot or one tittle can pass away. It is for the servants of Christ "earnestly to contend for the faith, once delivered to the saints." This building is now going on, "in whom the* whole building fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. ii. 21).

(3) HER MEASUREMENTS: Again we see that the

* Here again R.V. deletes "the," but there is sufficient authority for retaining it, including Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Ephraim (C), and the Syrian Vulgate (Peshitto).

city is not unlimited. It has, like the mystery of Eph. iii. (which indeed it is), "height and breadth and length and depth." God measures with a golden reed, what is of Himself. The city lieth foursquare—the length as large as the breadth, and either measures twelve thousand stadia. It is viewed as an immense pyramid, the height as great as the length or breadth of the base. The wall, too, is measured, as 144 cubits high, according to the well-known human measure, which is the measure the angel is using. It is noticeable how the number twelve and its multiples occur throughout this description. The number twelve is generally believed to represent perfect administrative capacity in the hands of man. All is in perfect proportion, because all is adjusted to the mind of God, according to the Divine purpose and pattern. The word to-day is no less imperative than in the day of Moses, "See that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the Mount" (Heb. viii. 5). Everything thus builded will be measured by God's golden reed, and though now not recognized even in the religious world, displayed in that day as the work of His Spirit, to His own praise and glory.

(4) HER MATERIALS (vv. 18-21): The wall is of jasper, an emblem, to judge from verse 11, of Divine glory. The first foundation is of the same. It is clearly a stone of exceeding preciousness, and so chosen to represent something above price. The city itself is of gold, "like unto clear glass," all of divine character and workmanship, and there are twelve foundations, representing the excellencies of Christ manifested by the Spirit in the saints. The particular meaning of each stone seems beyond present light, but they naturally bring to mind Aaron's breastplate, in which the twelve stones represent the tribes in their preciousness to Jehovah,

and in the beauty He Himself has put upon them (Exod. xxviii.).

The twelve gates are twelve pearls. The glory of the city is displayed in supernatural emblems. Pearls naturally remind us of the parable of the pearl in Matthew xiii., where the Lord Jesus, in the guise of a merchantman, is seen seeking goodly pearls. At last He finds one of transcendent beauty and sacrifices all He has to possess it. This is the side of election. The world indeed is a mass of corruption, but the Lord saw a beautiful pearl in that corruption.

(5) HER RELATIONS TO GOD (vv. 22-23): "And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." There will be no temple, for all is temple; no need to draw near, for all are in God and the Lamb. Some assert that the titles "Lord God Almighty" and "Lamb" are "millennial," but serious proof seems lacking, and we may be thankful it is so, for what a loss it would be were the Lord's redemptive title to fall into disuse, and why should God ever cease to be known as "the Almighty God"? What is there specially millennial about it, when it occurs in Genesis and the Pauline Epistles (*e.g.*, 2 Cor. vi. 18)?

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it." No longer will the lights of the first creation be needed, for the uncreated light of Divine glory eclipses all lesser lights. "The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." He will continue even then to be "the brightness of His glory."

(6) HER RELATIONS TO MAN: The nations that are saved, or simply the saved populations of the earth, outside Israel, shall walk in the light of it. It will be part of the Church's ministry to enlighten less favoured circles of blessing, and in response the hierarchies of earth will bring the glory and honour

of the people into it. There will be fellowship and interchange between the various categories of the redeemed, for all will be linked by a blessed common bond, the Lamb.

(7) HER CONDITIONS OF ENTRANCE: It has been said that the door of heaven is on earth, and the conditions detailed here of course do not imply that in the eternal state there will be the defiled, and abominable, and liars seeking entrance at the door of the Holy City. All such will be in a far different place. It is, however, a reminder now to all who bear such a character, that they must repent and "wash their robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb," if ever they are to walk those golden streets.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

THOUGH this chapter seems to run on naturally from chapter xxi., I believe there is a break of considerable importance, for in chapter xxi. we have the earthly side of the everlasting Kingdom, here the heavenly. It is the same Kingdom on a different plane. Hence, it is no longer a Tabernacle which meets our view, but a Throne, of which there is no mention in the description of the city. Things are on a larger scale here. It is the Throne of the Universe ; God is seen as the Supreme Governor of All. But His Throne is also that of the Lamb, in whom He is fully revealed as Light and Love. He is accordingly the Unique channel of blessing to all.

(8) HER SUPPLY OF BLESSING : A pure river of water of life is seen proceeding out of the Throne. It is the Spirit of God bearing inexhaustible supplies of blessing to the utmost confines of a universe of bliss.

From the bed of the river rises the Tree of Life, ever green and ever fruitful—symbol of Christ yielding perennially the precious fruits of His Person to sustain and gladden the redeemed. “ And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” But how could healing be needed in the eternal state ? Not in the curative,* but in the preventive sense, securing complete immunity for the saved ones on the new earth from all physical ailment or weakness. How blessedly the Heavenly Paradise regained,

* See Exodus xv. 26, where the sense of healing is clearly preventive (see Brown and Fausset on Rev. xxii.).

transcends that earthly paradise forfeited by sin. There we see the first man and his bride, here the second ; there four natural rivers, here a spiritual river of the water of life ; there a tree of life lost, here a far more wonderful tree free for all ; in that garden sin entered and the curse, here, as the next verse tells us, sin can never enter for—" There shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it." The question is sometimes raised, and it is one of the greatest interest and importance,—Will the stability of the Universe be henceforth secured ? or will the possibility remain of a fresh rebellion at some future epoch of Eternity ? The words we have just quoted give an unequivocal answer. "*There shall be no more curse !*" No doubt the moral liberty and will of angels and men will still be a reality but it will doubtless be sustained in each case by the power of the Divine Spirit. Certainly for one thing the hopelessness of such rebellion will be apparent to all. It is likely that it is for this very end that God is allowing full scope to rebel angels and men to work out their present rebellion to the bitter end. For if a rebellion headed by the one, who was, as seems clear, once God's viceroy, fails, as it certainly will, what hope of success could any future rebellion have ? The existence of an eternal hell, of which no doubt the reality will never be forgotten even in heaven, will be another. But the greatest of all deterrents will be the fact that the hand that holds the sceptre of the Universe is a pierced hand. The glorious fact of the atonement, revealing the infinite holiness and love of God, will so bind the heart and allegiance of the Universe to Him, in adoring gratitude and love, that the very thought of resisting His will, will for ever be a moral impossibility.

The Universe under the visible headship of the

creature was in unstable equilibrium, for it was supported from beneath; under the headship of Christ it will be in stable equilibrium, for it will be sustained from above by Him, "Who is over all, God blessed for ever."

Now we come to the last point.

(9) HER INHABITANTS AND THEIR OCCUPATION :

"His servant shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." Their service will spring from perfect communion with Himself and conformity to His will. "And there shall be no night there, for the Lord God giveth them light," and that light will never fail or be veiled. "And they shall reign for ever and ever." They will enjoy for ever the dignity of kings in association with Christ in His own everlasting Kingdom.

THE AUTHENTICATION OF THE MESSAGE

The prophetic visions properly speaking terminate at verse 5; they have carried us into a future eternity, and have completed the revelation that God is pleased to make. The remainder of the chapter is a kind of epilogue in which the Lord either personally or by His angel authenticates the whole book, emphasizing its inviolability and certainty of fulfilment.

Verse 6, "And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true, and the Lord . . . sent His angel to shew to His servants (lit. bondmen) the things which must shortly be done." Hitherto the testimony has been to the righteousness and truth of God, in His ways and judgments; (*e.g.*, chapters xv. 3, 16, 7; xix. 2); here the emphasis is on the faithfulness and truth of the words foretelling them. They are "faithful," that is sure of accomplishment, and they are also "true." This is no mere tautology. The

word here translated true is not *alēthēs* but *altēhinos*, that is, the words are to be taken as they stand. They are "true" not so much as opposed to what is false, but to what is figurative, the substance opposed to the shadow. Christ is said to be the true Light, Bread, Vine, etc., *alēthinos* in each case, that is, He is the reality, to which the figures point. If this be so, it encourages us to hold to the literal fulfilment in our interpretation of the book, except when the reverse is clearly indicated, and to avoid the allegorical and fanciful. It is far safer for us to believe that God means what He says, than something hidden and unreal, in which the imagination may run riot, as is the case in so much known as the "historical" interpretation of prophecy. The angel proceeds to explain how "the Lord God of the holy prophets, the same who in Old Testament times had foretold these things, had sent him to make known to His servants the things which must shortly be done." The phrase translated here shortly (*en tachei*), is the same root as "quickly" in the following verse. It is the phrase found in Acts xii. 7: when "Peter's chains *quickly* (i.e., suddenly) fell off him," or in Acts xxii. 18: "Get thee *quickly* out of Jerusalem," so that it may denote the speed with which a thing is done, equally well with the time when it is done. Again in Luke xviii. 8—it must have the former sense—where it follows on the assertion that the Lord may keep His people waiting, "though He bear long with them," but "will avenge them speedily." God will make "*a short work* in the earth,"* when he does rise up to take vengeance.

* The words of James, "Let every man be swift ('tachus') to hear," would seem to enjoin promptness to listen at once, and not to take an inordinate time in settling in, or finding our places, etc., by which much may be lost. It may even distract certain speakers to see some of their audience slowly turning over the leaves of their Bibles in a vain endeavour to find the place.

In verse 7 it must be the Lord who speaks directly : " Behold I come quickly ; blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." Thrice in this concluding section the Lord announces His speedy return, here and in verses 12 and 20, and in each case a different condition of blessing is attached. Here it is that of keeping the sayings of the book, which entails knowing and observing them.

Verse 8 : The effect on John's mind of the weighty words he heard, coupled with the glory and dignity of the angelic messenger, was so impressive, that " he fell down to worship the angel that spake to him," and this for the second time, for in chapter xix. 10, the same thing occurs. But the angel, no more than Peter at Cæsaræa, could not endure that a man should fall down before him in the attitude of worship. How different is that religious organization which boasts to be built on Peter. How often has one seen in their religious buildings abroad men and women grovelling before cardinals and bishops, but these great men never said like Peter, " Stand up, I myself also am a man." Satan and his angels thirst for the worship of man. This is the essence of all spurious worship whether of heathendom or Christendom ; " the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God " (1 Cor. x. 20). The very god of Ekron of which Ahaziah impiously enquired and for which he was so severely condemned by Jehovah, was Baal-zebub — the devil himself (2 Kings i.). How solemn for children of God to have the slightest fellowship with systems that spring from the god of this world, and redound to his glorification !

It must never be forgotten that Satan's chief work is as an angel of light on the religious plane. Yet professing followers of Christ are to be found who

affect the religious titles, dress and offices of his religious systems.

The elect angels are very jealous in maintaining the rights of God and of His Christ. They utterly repudiate the worship of men, for the word of God to them is "Let all the angels of God worship Him." (Heb. i. 6), but though in a more exalted sphere, they are satisfied to take their place as servants alongside of men. "I am thy fellow-servant and of (*i.e.*, fellow servant of) thy brethren the prophets," etc. "Worship God!" "God is Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

THE SIGN-MANUAL OF THE MESSENGER

The prophet Daniel is enjoined at the close of his prophecy, "to shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end" (chap. xii. 4), but here, in contrast, John is forbidden "to seal the sayings of the prophecy of this book," the reason being given, "for the time is at hand." Thus, whereas no real light could be expected on the prophecies of the Old Testament seer, at the time of their delivery, owing to the distance from their accomplishment, the Church is encouraged to expect the direct teaching of the Spirit in the book before us—"He shall shew you things to come," and this affords an additional reason for its prayerful meditation. The "time" here referred to is *kairos* a crisis, not *chronos* a period. That crisis will be marked by its final character; then the destiny of men will be fixed without *hope* of change for some. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still," etc.; the opportunity for conversion and moral change for such being for ever past; and, without *fear* of change for others; they, too, attain an unchanging condition—"he that is righteous, let

him be righteous still ; and he that is holy let him be holy still." This condition will be determined by the Lord at His coming in discriminating judgment " to give every man according as his work shall be."

" I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last." This is the third time that the Lord describes Himself in a similar way (see chapter i. 8 and 12). This employment of the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet seems to identify Him with the message which " God hath spoken by His Son," the complete, all-inclusive, exhaustive revelation of God, as though He would say, all the resources of language will not suffice to tell of Me—" the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." The expression " beginning and ending " describes, it would seem, if we compare chapter i. 8, His eternal being, and the phrase " first and last " His glories in connection with the New Creation, of which He is the First-begotten and the Commencement.

Undoubtedly, the correct reading of verse 14 is " Blessed are they that wash their robes," a parallel to chapter vii. 14, where the same words occur. Providentially, the Vulgate and the Romanist versions in general springing from it had the right reading, or we should have had this verse perpetually quoted by Romanists to bolster up their favourite dogma of salvation by works. The words as they stand remind us that it is the atoning blood of Christ alone which enables sinful man to stand before the throne of God as in chapter vii. 14, and as we have it here, to enjoy the additional rights to eat of the tree of life, and enter the gates of the city.

But solemn truth ! there is a without, as well as a within. " Without are the dogs"—a figurative expression for the morally unclean—the generic

description, I think, of the various species of unclean persons that follow—"the sorcerers, including all traffickers with evil spirits, the whoremongers—the murderers, the idolators and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie—including deception of every kind" (the definite article in each case).

Once more the Lord adds His sign-manual to all that has gone before. "I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches," a sufficient answer one would think to those who object to prophetic study as unfruitful. It ought not, it need not be this, if rightly used. Jesus is the universal name; the following descriptive title connects Him with the royal line of Judah: "I am the root and the offspring of David." As Divine, He is the root, as man He is the off-shoot. It is the solution of the old question "If David then call Him Lord, how is He, then, his Son." "Made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power" (Matt. xxii. 45; Rom. i. 3, 4). This has to do more especially with Israel. The following title is for the special attention of the Church, "I am the bright and morning star," which shows, as we have seen, that the New Testament will reach its climax before the Old, for in Malachi iv. we see Him rising as "the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings." The church is waiting for the Morning Star. How, then, is the next verse to be taken? We are often told that the Spirit and the Bride are calling to Christ, whose coming has been suggested by the simile of the Morning Star; but this, I cannot help feeling, is somewhat fanciful and unreal, and there is a sound objection to it, it necessitates two distinct meanings of the word "come," in the same verse the coming of Christ to His church, and the coming of the sinner to Christ. I believe the whole verse is the final gospel invitation

to the unsaved before the canon of Scripture is completed, and the door of mercy closes. "The Spirit and the Bride say come"—the collective call; and "let him that heareth say come," the individual call; and "let him that is athirst come"—the call of personal need; and "whosoever will let him take the water of life freely"—the universal call.

Verses 18 and 19 contain the closing warnings of Scripture to those who add to or take from the words of the prophecy of His book. "Adding to the word" has always been the work of the religious formalist; "taking away," that of the religious rationalist.

The penalty of "adding" to God's word is to have His plagues added to you, that of "taking away" to be shut out from the tree* of life, from the holy city, from the blessings written in the book. Primarily these warnings apply to the Revelation. But those who deliberately tamper with the Bible in any part are raising a solemn question as to how far they have ever "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," or must not rather be added to the "outsiders" of verse 15. In obscuring or denying the Truth of God, they love and make a lie. Verse 20 proclaims the last promise of the Saviour—He which testifieth these things saith, "Surely, I come quickly." There is nothing about rewards or blessings here. It is Himself who is coming, the Lover of our souls, our Redeemer. And the response of every redeemed soul, in fellowship with Him, is: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" And "so shall we ever be with the Lord."

The Lord Himself shall come
And shout the quickening word;
Thousands shall answer from the tomb,
For ever with the Lord.

* No doubt "tree" is the right reading. No name once written in the book of life will be erased, but this "shutting out" is being denied access to the tree of life, which has never been enjoyed.

Then, as we upward fly,
That resurrection word
Shall be our shout of victory
For ever with the Lord.

How shall I meet those eyes ?
Mine on Himself I cast,
And own myself the Saviour's prize,
Mercy from first to last.

JAMES MONTGOMERY.

Here, indeed, the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" to Him. The Book closes with a final benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." Amen!

Thus gloriously ends with the Redeemer's grace, the Divine Book that began with His Creator Glory.